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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*From the engraved portrait by Martin Droeshout on the title-page of the First Folio*



AN INTRODUCTION  
to the Reading of  
SHAKESPEARE

by  
FREDERICK S. BOAS



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## P R E F A C E

As a number of introductory books about Shakespeare have recently appeared, it may be well to state when, and for what purpose, this little volume was originally planned. During the later days of the Great War I was asked to write something which might be helpful to an intelligent reader who had a volume of Shakespeare's plays but had no knowledge of the critical literature about them, and who wanted some preliminary difficulties cleared away and a few suggestions as to fruitful lines of study. The little book was published by Mr. Gerald Duckworth, and from opinions expressed about it I was led to think that it might be useful to a wider circle than I had thought of at first. By the kindness of Mr. Duckworth, to whom my cordial thanks are due, the volume is now reissued in extended form by the Oxford University Press as one of the World's Manuals.

But the little book still keeps to the purpose of its title—*An Introduction to the Reading of Shakespeare*. It does not seek to compete with Dowden's classic *Primer* ; it does not deal with ' the Man ' and says little about ' his Stage ', the subjects of a well-known volume in this series ; it is not a critical commentary upon the individual plays—which I

have previously attempted in *Shakspeare*<sup>1</sup> and his *Predecessors*. Its aim is to remove, or to lighten, some of the obstacles which 'the general reader' often finds to the understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare's plays and poems.

F. S. B.

<sup>1</sup> I have since then adopted what has now become the generally accepted spelling of the name.

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## *How Shakespeare's Plays were published*

‘CONSIDER now, if they asked us, Will you give up your Indian Empire or your Shakespeare, you English ; never have had any Indian Empire, or never have had any Shakespeare ? Really it were a grave question. Official persons would answer doubtless in official language ; but we, for our part too, should not we be forced to answer : Indian Empire, or no Indian Empire ; we cannot do without Shakespeare !’

In this well-known passage from his Lecture on ‘The Hero as Poet’ Carlyle asserts that Shakespeare is a more precious imperial heritage than even India, and his resonant proclamation of the master-dramatist’s inestimable worth to the British race might fitly stand at the head of any treatise upon him. But the words are quoted here because they suggest another comparison between Shakespeare and India. We can imagine a traveller landing for the first time in that vast dominion ; ignorant of its history, unfamiliar with its languages, customs, and forms of religion, and without a knowledge of the localities best worth visiting for their natural beauties or their associations. Such a traveller, especially if his time were limited, would waste his opportunities, not knowing where to go or what to look for, and after fruitless wandering would leave India disillusioned and resolved never to return to it.

A similar experience may easily befall the reader who, attracted by Shakespeare’s fame as the world’s greatest dramatist, plunges into the study of his works without preparation or guidance. He knows little or nothing of the political and social conditions of Elizabethan England ; of the peculiarities of the platform-stage on which the plays were originally acted ; of the manner of their publication and the editing through which they have since gone ; of the changes in speech, taste, and morals

that have marked the three centuries since Shakespeare's death in 1616. Hence at a first reading he may easily find himself perplexed and disappointed, and may think in his heart that the exaltation of Shakespeare is largely conventional lip-service—as indeed at times it has become.

Let us take an illustration. On opening a one-volume edition of the dramatist's works, e.g. the 'Oxford' or the 'Globe', we find in succession fourteen comedies, ten English history plays, thirteen tragedies (of which seven are on classical subjects) and a number of poems. Suppose that the reader, knowing the outlines of his country's annals, decides to start with the English history-plays, beginning with *King John*. He is at once astonished to find that the most famous episode in the reign of John—the signing of Magna Carta—is omitted, and that the political interest of the play lies in the relation of England to France and the Papacy. Similarly in *Richard II* he will look in vain for the familiar and dramatic incident of Wat Tyler's rebellion. Shakespeare concerns himself only with the last few years of the reign, giving us a full-length portrait of Richard as a crowned sentimentalist, who is bereft of throne and life by the iron-willed Bolingbroke. Richard's speeches have a poetic charm, which delights us also in the verse portions of *Henry IV*, Parts I and II, and *Henry V*, wherein the story of the national fortunes is carried on till after the battle of Agincourt. But both *Henry IV* and *Henry V* have new and distinctive features. In the former prose comic scenes, of which Falstaff is the central figure, are mingled with the historic episodes; in the latter the narrative and descriptive choruses give the play a semi-epic character. With all their diversity, however, *Richard II*, the two Parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V* are akin in their vivid portraiture, their balanced structure, and their exquisite harmonies of verse or prose.

These four closely related plays are followed by four others—



the three Parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*—dealing with the Wars of the Roses till the final overthrow of the Yorkists at Bosworth Field. But the surprising fact is that this second group differs from the former in almost every characteristic. The three Parts of *Henry VI* include a disconnected series of episodes, thrown together with little art, though here and there crudely impressive, and lacking in all the finer graces of style and presentation. *Richard III*, the last of the group, has more unity, but the crookback king is a sinister and melodramatic figure unlike any hitherto encountered in the historical plays.

Then closing the series comes *Henry VIII*, masterly in its presentation of the king's divorce and the fall of Wolsey, but as chaotic in structure as any of the Parts of *Henry VI*, and written in two poetic styles glaringly different from each other, and from any in the preceding nine chronicle-histories.

Faced by these unexpected and perplexing results of his first adventure in Shakespearian study the reader may turn more hopefully to the lighter sphere of the comedies. But here, too, he will find himself puzzled if he follows the order of the plays in his one-volume edition. *The Tempest*, which heads the list, is a product of mellow genius, of inspired vision. What a drop from it to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a pleasant piece but of no great significance, with its conventional handling of fickleness in love! How different again is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a thoroughly English farcical comedy, with its central figure a Falstaff, in whom it is difficult to recognize the Sir John of *Henry IV*. And in sombre contrast is *Measure for Measure*, probing so deeply into painful and repellent themes that the title of comedy seems strangely out of place.

The reader may therefore prefer to turn his attention to the tragedies, but the first of these, *Troilus and Cressida*, is singularly lacking in all the nobler elements of tragic art, and travesties

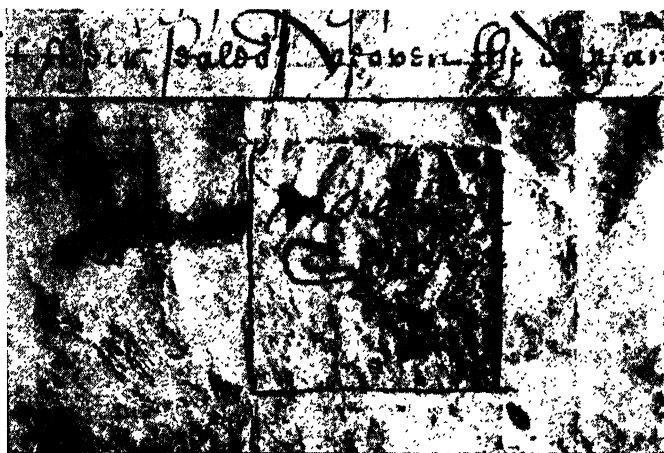
the great figures of Greek epic. On the other hand, *Coriolanus*, the next in the series, raises personages and episodes from early Roman history into the sphere of the sublime. And thence what an abrupt plunge into the crude barbarism of *Titus Andronicus*. This in its turn gives place to the lyrical loveliness and radiance of *Romeo and Juliet*.

It is needless to give further instances. Any one who attempts to study Shakespeare's history-plays, comedies, or tragedies by reading them in the order in which they usually are printed meets with difficulties and surprises at almost every step. Is there any explanation of all this? Is it possible to point the way to a more advantageous route, a more profitable method, of Shakespearian study?

The first essential is to have a clear understanding of the way in which the dramatist's works got into print. To do this we must put aside most of the ideas that we associate with the publication of books to-day. Not a scrap of Shakespeare's manuscript has come down to us, unless we accept the view of a number of experts that three leaves of a play in the British Museum, *Sir Thomas More*, are in his hand. We know his writing solely through the signatures to his will and to other legal documents. The only works whose publication he seems to have personally authorized are the two early poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, which he dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. Elizabethan dramatists seldom published their own plays, of which the copyright belonged to the theatrical companies that had produced them. Recent investigation, however, tends to show that it was often the author's original manuscript that was sent by the company to the printer, after it had been used as a prompt copy in the theatre.

It is highly probable that it was in this way that a number of Shakespeare's plays first came into the book-market. During his lifetime sixteen of them, beginning with *Titus Andronicus* in 1594,

were issued in quarto at 5*d.* or 6*d.* each. Nine of them reached from two to five editions in this form before 1616. Some of these versions, however, *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Henry V* (1598, 1602, 1608), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), *Hamlet* (1603), and *Pericles* (1609, 1611), are so imperfect that they must have



SHAKESPEARE'S SIGNATURE. *From the purchase deed of a house in Blackfriars, 10 March 1613.*

been unauthorized. They may have been based on shorthand notes taken at performances, with possibly the help of a transcript of one or more actor's parts ; or (as has been recently suggested) they may represent shortened versions used in provincial tours. The other quartos—including the second editions of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599) and *Hamlet* (1604)—appear to reproduce substantially what Shakespeare wrote, and may well have been printed from his own manuscripts. Six years after his death, in 1622, a hitherto unprinted play, *Othello*, appeared in quarto.

Thus seventeen plays had been separately issued, but the world might have lost more than half of Shakespeare's dramatic work, including such masterpieces as *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*, had not in the following year, 1623, two of his fellow actors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, edited for a group of printers and publishers the great collection of Shakespeare's plays known as the First Folio. This contained nearly one thousand pages in double column, and included not only all the dramas (except *Pericles*) previously issued in quarto, but twenty that had not hitherto found their way into print. The editors claimed that they had used Shakespeare's own 'papers', or manuscripts, for the volume, and the title-page states that the plays were printed 'according to the true originall copies'. The quartos, however, though slightly termed 'stolne and surreptitious copies', evidently in a number of cases supplied the basis for the folio text.<sup>1</sup>

We owe Heminges and Condell an incalculable debt for preserving to us a heritage of priceless value. But they were working actors, not dramatists or critics, and in some respects they (or the publishers associated with them) did their work unintelligently, and thus created difficulties for readers of Shakespeare which have been illustrated above.

To begin with they made no distinction between plays of which Shakespeare was sole author and those which he merely touched up, or in which he collaborated with fellow workers. The copyright of a play, as has been seen, vested in the company that produced it. Hence it was a common practice for a dramatist to refurbish an old piece which had become out of date, or which lent itself to improvement. Shakespeare, especially in his earlier years, took his share of this hack-work, the results of which appeared in the Folio on the same level

<sup>1</sup> See further, Chapter VIII, p. 86.

with the ripest products of his genius. One wonders whether, if Shakespeare had been his own editor, he would have admitted the three Parts of *Henry VI*, or *Titus Andronicus* into the canon of his works. In any case he would scarcely have placed the last-named play, which he had merely touched up, between *Coriolanus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. We have already seen the confusing effect of such juxtaposition.

Besides pitchforking together works of purely Shakespearian and of composite authorship the Folio editors made no attempt to arrange the plays in order of date. They opened the volume with *The Tempest*, which was written almost at the end of Shakespeare's career, and they followed it with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a very early comedy. Here again we have seen the perplexing result of this sequence. And so it is throughout the Folio. There is the division into comedies, history-plays, and tragedies, but otherwise the arrangement is quite arbitrary, except that the histories follow the chronological order of the kings' reigns. Even this is unfortunate, as the splendid series, *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (Parts I and II), and *Henry V*, is followed by the three Parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, which the most inexperienced student feels to be far inferior, and which (so far as they are Shakespeare's) are the work of his prentice hand; while *Henry VIII* (also only in part his) has the characteristics of his latest style.

It may be asked how we know when the various plays were written, if Heminges and Condell were silent on the point. Our information is incomplete, and on details there are differences of view, but there is enough evidence to group the plays as a whole in their order of composition.

In 1598, about the middle of Shakespeare's dramatic career, a Cambridge scholar, Francis Meres, published a short critical work, *Wit's Treasury*, in which he mentioned twelve of the

plays,<sup>1</sup> which must therefore have been written before that year. Allusions by diarists and letter-writers help to fix the date of some later plays. Entries in the Stationers' Register, records in the account books of the Master of the Revels of performances at Court, and the publication of the quartos add further to our knowledge. Some of the plays contain references to events of the time, after which they must have been written. The most famous of these is in *Henry V* to the expedition of the Earl of Essex to Ireland in 1599. And there are changes in language, versification, technique, and characterization which go far to show whether a play is early or late.

Many of these points are technical, and it is not advisable to go into them deeply in the first stages of Shakespearian study.<sup>2</sup> It is enough to realize that there are solid grounds for fixing the general order of the plays, and that we can read them, if we wish, more or less in the sequence in which they were written. There are, of course, other methods of grouping them, according to their *motif*, their subject, the era in which the plot is laid, and so forth. Or we may choose a play at random, and if we read it with intelligence and appreciation much of its beauty and significance will be revealed. But some acquaintance with the outlines of Shakespeare's dramatic development increases our enjoyment and deepens our understanding of the individual plays. It enables us to see them in their relation to one another and to the genius and art of their creator as a whole. It saves us from wandering into side-tracks and blind alleys, when we wish to tread the broad highways of Shakespeare's undiscovered country.

<sup>1</sup> Among them is *Love's Labour's Won*, probably an earlier version of *All's Well that Ends Well*.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent short summary of the chronological evidences see Chapter IV of E. Dowden's *Shakespeare Primer*.

## II

### *Shakespeare's Play-writing, from 'Titus Andronicus' to 'The Tempest'*

SHAKESPEARE left his native town, Stratford-on-Avon, for London in or about 1586. When he arrived in the capital the permanent lines of Elizabethan drama, upon which he was content to work, were being definitely fixed by a gifted band of playwrights. In tragedy Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe were the leading figures. Kyd (1558-94), a Londoner by birth, wrote about 1587 *The Spanish Tragedy*, a melodramatic but powerful and skilfully constructed play which won great notoriety. It dealt with a father's revenge for his murdered son, and Kyd almost certainly also wrote a play, now lost, on the story of Hamlet, a son's revenge for his murdered father. Marlowe (1564-93), a native of Canterbury, produced *Tamburlaine* (in two Parts) in 1587-8, followed by *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*. The novel splendour of his blank verse and the limitless ardours and ambitions of his titanic creations captivated the popular ear and imagination. Other playwrights of note were John Lyly, the author of the famous novel, *Euphues*, Robert Greene, and George Peele.

It was in association with some of these writers, or in imitation of them, that Shakespeare began his own career as a dramatist. It may be divided conveniently into four periods, of which the first ranges from about 1588 to 1594. In tragedy and history-play he begins by following so closely in the steps of his predecessors that criticism cannot completely disentangle his individual work. Mention has been made already of his earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, which exaggerates the worst faults of Kyd's school. Some deny Shakespeare's hand in it at all, but

we cannot totally reject a play ascribed to him by Meres and by the editors of the First Folio. Part I of *Henry VI*, with its slanderous portraiture of Joan of Arc, is almost as crude as *Titus Andronicus*, and Parts II and III, founded upon two older plays, seem to bear traces of the work of Marlowe and Greene, as well as of Shakespeare. *Richard III* is probably his alone, but in the unique prominence given to the central figure and in his limitless ambition there are clear proofs of Marlowe's influence. *King John* is founded upon an anonymous play, in two Parts, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*. In such figures as Faulconbridge, Arthur, and his mother Constance the dramatist's unique power of character-drawing appears. But the student, as a rule, will be well advised to leave the earliest historical plays alone till he has made himself familiar with Shakespeare's more mature and characteristic work.

In his comedies Shakespeare from the first shows his individual genius more distinctly. Even his earliest pieces in this kind have the combination of humour, good sense, and fancy, which is his special secret. To *Love's Labour's Lost* clings something of the fragrance of the countryside, which its author had recently quitted. It is a youthful travesty of fashionable affectations of speech, and a satire on an attempt by one of the sexes—in this case men, represented by the King of Navarre and his followers—to set at defiance some of the elementary principles of human life. *The Comedy of Errors* is a skilful adaptation of a play by the Roman dramatist Plautus. It heightens the fun of the original by introducing two sets of twin brothers, who are mistaken for each other, instead of one, and at the same time it adds a deeper undertone. It is a piece that has to be seen on the stage to be fully appreciated. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is Shakespeare's first experiment in the vein of Italian sentimental comedy which he was later to bring to such perfection. Launce



and Speed, however, the clownish servants, hail from Stratford rather than from Verona.

But for the revelation of Shakespeare's youthful genius in its most enchanting aspects we must turn to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In the *Dream* we are not gravely concerned with the fate of the two pairs of lovers. What enthralles us is the contact, and the contrast, between the Warwickshire country bumpkins—for such the so-called Athenian craftsmen, Bottom and his companions, really are—and the exquisite fairy world ruled by Oberon and Titania, a world for which the folk-lore of the time furnished many a hint, but to which Shakespeare's art has given so marvellous a consistency and verisimilitude. In *Romeo and Juliet* we have a tragedy essentially different alike from the melodramatic *Titus Andronicus* and from the tragedies of Shakespeare's maturity. It thrills with the ardour of lyrical passion and the catastrophe at the close is not brought about by some fatal sin or weakness, but by the collision between Youth and Love and Hate and Death. We are shown the raptures, intoxicating and transitory, of a love,

Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold',  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.

*Romeo and Juliet* was probably completed about 1595, and is thus on the border between Shakespeare's first and second dramatic periods. The latter ranges from 1595 to 1601, and contains two great groups of plays, the historical series, *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (Parts I and II), and *Henry V*, and the principal comedies.

Shakespeare's powers had now ripened, and to this epoch

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belongs much of his most flawless workmanship. His joyous energies flow forth without stay or stint, and figure after figure springs into superb and radiant existence. In *Richard II* we have a wonderful portrait of the attractive but sentimental king, a pseudo-poet, who thinks that he can rule powerful barons by mere rhetoric, and is thus brought to his doom. Contrasted with him we have the silent man of blood and iron, Bolingbroke, who carves his way relentlessly to the throne. In the two Parts of *Henry IV* we see Bolingbroke seated on the throne that he has won ; but we now view him in his limitations rather than in his strength, and in contrast with his son, Prince Hal, the heroic youth whose true nobility is obscured by superficial follies. In the same play we have the brilliant, though egotistical, figure of Hotspur ; and Shakespeare's most complex comic creation, Falstaff, who defies, and all but defeats, realities with the inexhaustible play of his wit. In *Henry V* we see Prince Hal as king and war-lord, leading the English folk to victory over the French, who were in Shakespeare's eyes their hereditary foes. The play is epic in character rather than dramatic. The underlying theme of the whole series of chronicle-histories, the greatness of England, rises to the surface and sweeps away all minor motives. Henry is the personified genius of his race, and the play is instinct with the imperial spirit of the Elizabethan age.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the link between the history-plays of this period and the comedies. It reintroduces Falstaff (though so altered in all but name and externals as to be scarcely recognizable) not in the Boar's Head tavern or on the battlefield, but in the gabled houses and sylvan outskirts of the royal township. Sly, the tinker of Burton Heath, in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, carries us with him into the more purely rustic atmosphere of Warwickshire village life. The play

itself, an adaptation of an older comedy, combines a drastic handling of the relation of the sexes with a characteristically Italian love intrigue.

Both these pieces have farcical elements not found in the four greatest comedies, amongst which, in spite of its almost tragic episodes, we may reckon *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare found many hints in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, but the play shows an unprecedented mastery of plot-construction, and prodigal powers of character-drawing in Shylock, Portia, Bassanio, and the motley crowd of minor figures. A little later come the three closely allied plays, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*. In them the verbal extravagances which mark the early comedies, and even in part *The Merchant of Venice*, have largely disappeared. We have dialogues in matchless prose, with the clear-cut edge and sparkle of a diamond, or verse mellow with musical charm. These plays are comedies in the finest sense, not mere collections of mirth-provoking incidents, but pictures of life in its sunnier aspects, though leavened with enough of mischance and misdoing not to lose a hold of reality. Beatrice and Benedick, Dogberry and Verges; Malvolio, Viola, and Feste, the Clown; Rosalind, Orlando and Touchstone, all belong to this wonderful period of comic creation.

The most delightful avenue to Shakespearian study is through the plays of this second period. When we turn to the third period, stretching from 1601 to 1609, we find ourselves in a different atmosphere. Shakespeare now handles for the first time the deeper problems of life, and faces its tragic riddles. The very greatness of their themes makes some of these plays less perfectly balanced than those of the preceding period. Then language and thought had been in harmonious equipoise; now the burden of thought is often too heavy for the language

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to bear without undue strain. This, however, is only partly true of *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, with which Shakespeare's seventeenth-century series of tragedies opens. These two plays retain their attractions unabated alike on the stage and in the study, largely because in them Shakespeare deals for the first time with the weightiest moral issues, while yet keeping much of the lucidity and noble simplicity of diction which belong to the work of his second period.

*Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* are otherwise akin. Their leading figures, unlike the later tragic heroes, do not fall through sin. Brutus fails through excess of idealism, too absolute trust in his fellow men. Yet we honour him more in defeat than the practical Cassius who would have made a success of the conspiracy, or than the astute Antony who ensures its ruin.

Hamlet suffers from a disease of the will which makes the task of revenge for his father's murder a burden too heavy to be borne. The Danish Prince, as we have seen, had already figured as the hero of a 'revenge' play, almost certainly from the hand of Kyd. It was one of Shakespeare's supreme achievements to transform such a conventionally melodramatic type into the richly endowed, over-sensitive man of genius, an idealist by nature, to whom the Denmark ruled by Claudius and his minister Polonius is a 'prison'. Every reader has his own way of trying to pluck out the heart of his mystery, and is always baffled in part because it seems rooted in unique measure in Shakespeare's own experience of life.

Something of the reflective and disillusioned spirit of *Hamlet* is found in the three difficult plays, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. The two former are classed in the Folio among the comedies, but they lack the genial inspiration of the true comic muse, though Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, is one of the noblest of Shakespeare's

creations. Similarly *Troilus and Cressida* leaves a bitter taste, instead of purging and bracing our emotions as tragedy should do. To the advanced student these plays are of extraordinary interest, but if we wish to follow the main line of Shakespeare's development we should go on from *Hamlet* to the later tragedies which exhibit the downfall of lofty spirits through some overmastering sin.

In *Othello* the noble Moor is ruined by 'jealousy',<sup>1</sup> and involves in his fate Desdemona, gentlest and most innocent, except perhaps Ophelia, of all Shakespeare's heroines; while Iago embodies, under a deceptive cover of bluff honesty, the very spirit of evil. As Coleridge has said his is a 'motiveless malignity', and he clicks his canakin, and jests and sings in a world lit up by the glare of hell. In *King Lear*, a drama conceived on almost epic lines, evil and ruin are wrought on an even wider scale. The old king becomes the victim of his passionate self-will, and lack of insight into his daughters' hearts. Goneril and Regan are primeval monsters of the slime rather than women, and in Edmund, the child of nature, they find a fit ally. The good and the evil characters in the play are mingled at the close in a common doom. Shakespeare boldly recognizes that amid the clash of the iron forces of the universe love and purity are often crushed. But in their essence they are inviolable by the shocks of fortune; they exist, and in their existence lies their all-sufficient vindication.

*Macbeth*, another tragedy based, like *King Lear*, on the legendary history of the Celts, shows the fall of a valiant soldier through ambition and inability to resist temptation, inward and outward, personified in the 'weird sisters', and driven home by the unfaltering will and logic of his wife, the 'dearest partner' of his greatness. In *Antony and Cleopatra* another noble warrior

<sup>1</sup> See further, Chapter VI, p. 65.

goes to his doom, caught in the toils of the marvellous Egyptian queen, with her 'infinite variety' of sensuous charm. In *Coriolanus* the ruin of yet another heroic soldier is wrought by pride of person and of class. With these tragedies on classical themes we may group *Timon of Athens*, though it is only in part by Shakespeare, and falls far below their sustained majesty of style and characterization.

It is remarkable that after being occupied with tragedy for nearly ten years Shakespeare should about 1609 have turned to a different dramatic type, which gives a special character to his closing period of authorship till about 1612. *Pericles* is a link between the tragedies and the 'dramatic romances', as his last plays have been called. Like *Timon* it is based on classical legend, and is only partly by Shakespeare. Much of it is poor stuff, and the editors of the First (and Second) Folios did not include it. But the scenes dealing with the fortunes of Marina, the lost daughter of Pericles, link it with *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, the splendid final achievement of Shakespeare's unaided art.

In all these plays there are wondrous adventures by land and sea, partings and estrangements of parents and children, of husbands and wives. But in the end we see reunion and reconciliation, and forgiveness of wrong done. In *Cymbeline* Imogen welcomes back her erring husband, Posthumus; the king's sons after their wanderings are restored to their father. In *The Winter's Tale* the wronged queen, Hermione, descends from the pedestal where she has played the part of a statue, to clasp to her arms her husband, Leontes, and her child, Perdita.

In *The Tempest* Prospero's magic is put into play to restore himself and Miranda to their long-lost duchy, and to unite the maiden and the gallant Ferdinand in eternal bonds of love. When his work is done Prospero makes his great renunciation:

Graves at my command  
Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let them forth  
By my so potent art. But this rough magic  
I here abjure. . . . I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
I'll drown my book.

This sounds as if it were Shakespeare's own farewell to the enchanted island of the theatre, and so it is in symbol, if not in literal fact. For the dramatic romances were followed by *Henry VIII*, in which Shakespeare collaborated with the younger dramatist, John Fletcher. It is interesting to go through the loosely connected scenes of this play, picking out by tests of style and versification the work of the two authors.<sup>1</sup> It will be found that some of the best-known episodes, such as Wolsey's farewell interview with Cromwell, are from the pen of Fletcher.

Beyond the magnificent dramatic domain of which a bird's-eye view has been attempted in this chapter the ordinary reader of Shakespeare will not at first need to travel. But the more advanced Elizabethan student will take account of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, attributed to Shakespeare and Fletcher in a quarto of 1634; of *Sir Thomas More*, a manuscript play in which (as already mentioned) some eminent experts have claimed certain leaves to be from Shakespeare's pen; and of *Edward III*, *Arden of Feversham*, and other less notable pieces which at one time or another have been assigned, but without warrant, to the master-dramatist. All these have their attraction, but they may wait their turn till we have feasted full on the Shakespearian banquet itself.

<sup>1</sup> These tests also indicate, in the opinion of some good critics, that Philip Massinger had a hand in the scenes usually assigned to Shakespeare.

### III

#### *Shakespeare's Theatrical Workmanship*

WE have spoken hitherto of Shakespeare's plays in their book form because it is thus that we usually first make acquaintance with them, and because a number of them are never known to most of us in any other way. But we must never forget that they were written primarily to be acted, not to be printed ; for the stage, not for the bookseller. The ignoring of this elementary fact has led to much misdirected criticism. There have been authors both in England and elsewhere who have written literary drama, who have used dialogue form without any thought of the practical needs and limitations of the theatre. Nearly all the plays of the leaders of the Romantic movement in England—Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley—were written for publication not for performance. But with Shakespeare the case is different. He was an actor-dramatist and theatrical shareholder, who wrote to satisfy the demands of popular audiences, and to whom the success or failure of one of his pieces was a matter of vital concern. Unless we lay fast hold of this fact we shall miss much of significance in his work.

Shakespeare wrote for Elizabethan theatres—the Theater, the Curtain, the Globe, and the Blackfriars—and these theatres differed in important respects from those in which we see his plays acted to-day. We are not certain about all the details, for our information is imperfect, and is taken from various sources, such as drawings, woodcuts, specifications, and descriptions which are not entirely consistent with one another. Moreover, there were differences between the earlier and later theatres, and between the public and private houses. But on the chief points there is little doubt.

In a modern theatre the audience sits in front of the stage,



and the proscenium arch is a frame to the acting, which is seen by the spectators as a moving picture. The stage of an Elizabethan theatre jutted into the yard, where the 'groundlings', who represent the 'pit' of to-day, stood close about it, as speakers on a platform are often surrounded to-day. Hence the two types of stage have been distinguished as the 'picture' and the 'platform' stage.

There was no drop curtain which descended, as is now the rule, at the close of each Act. But there was a curtain hanging at some distance from the back of the stage. When this curtain was closed the stage was divided into an inner and an outer part. When it was drawn back the whole stage was exposed to view.<sup>1</sup> Above there was a gallery.

Shakespeare's plays were written to suit these conditions, and they therefore necessarily differ in important features from the productions of our own day. When a drop scene is used a playwright always works up to a climax at the close of each Act, when the curtain comes down upon a striking situation. Thus the play is divided into three, four, or five units, as the case may be, in each of which there is a gradual *crescendo*. The typical Elizabethan play was constructed on a different principle. Its movement was continuous, and was not broken by the fall at intervals of a curtain which arrested the acting. There was usually a sustained quickening of interest up to the central point of the play; then an interval of relaxed tension, followed by a secondary climax at the close.

The stage was in view of the audience throughout, though when the curtain was closed only the outer part was visible. On this were acted the scenes in which few characters appeared, and where the locality was vaguely supposed to be a street, or

<sup>1</sup> There is, however, no curtain visible in the contemporary drawing of the Swan Theatre on p. 29.

a room. When the curtain was drawn back the whole stage could be used for scenes which introduced many characters, and which represented a banqueting-hall or garden, the interior of a church or a court of justice. The gallery was used for scenes where the characters appeared 'aloft', as Juliet's bedroom, or the walls of Angiers (in *King John*, Act II. i); or of Harfleur (in *Henry V*, Act III. iii), wherefrom the citizens or the Governor parley with their foes.

The editors of Shakespeare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as is explained more fully in Chapter VIII, were frequently unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the Elizabethan theatre. They therefore introduced many stage-directions, which have no warrant in the original texts, and which often proved a source of confusion. Similarly Shakespearian actors after the Restoration from Betterton to Garrick, and from Garrick to Kean and Irving adapted the plays to the scenic conditions of the contemporary theatre. It is only in recent years that specialist researches have guided us to a clearer insight into the type of playhouse for which Shakespeare wrote. As a result we have had the productions by Mr. William Poel, Mr. Granville-Barker, and Mr. Fagan which have aimed at returning wholly or in part to the original model. And in the latest editions of Shakespeare's works more care, as will be seen, is being taken to distinguish between the stage-directions in the earliest texts and those that have been added by various editors.

It will be helpful, in illustration of what has been said above, to go through so familiar a play as *The Merchant of Venice*, and see how far we can follow its representation on the platform stage. The action begins on the outer part with the dialogue between Antonio and his friends, in which we hear of his many



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ventures at sea, and of Bassanio's longing to win the hand of Portia. The next scene, in which Portia discusses her suitors with Nerissa, was also probably on the outer stage, with nothing except the dialogue to show that we are now at Belmont instead of Venice. On the outer stage took place also the interview with Shylock, in which the momentous bargain about the pound of flesh is struck; the dialogues of Launcelot Gobbo with his father, Bassanio, and Jessica; and Shylock's farewell to his daughter before he goes out to supper. But Jessica's elopement appears to have taken place in a full-stage scene, as before her flight with Lorenzo she appears 'above', i. e. in the balcony over the proscenium doors.

The scenes in which Portia's suitors make choice of the caskets were acted on the full stage. The caskets appear to have been placed behind the curtain, for when Morocco proceeds to make his choice Portia gives the direction :

Go, draw aside the curtains, and discover  
The several caskets to this noble prince.

And when he has made selection of the golden casket she cries :

A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go !

Similarly when Arragon is about to enter Nerissa exclaims :

Quick, quick, I pray thee ; draw the curtain straight.

After his selection of the silver casket Portia again cries, 'Come, draw the curtain, Nerissa'. When Bassanio makes his choice there is no such direct reference to the curtain, but an attentive reading of the scene suggests the following arrangement. Portia and Bassanio speak the first forty lines on the outer stage till the heroine's exhortation :

Away then ! I am lock'd in one of them,  
If you do love me, you will find me out.  
Nerissa and the rest, stand all aloof.

Bassanio then proceeds alone to the inner part of the stage, and, drawing the curtain, chooses the leaden casket, which makes Portia his bride.

The short scene in which Antonio, attended by his jailer, is reviled by Shylock took place on the outer stage. So probably did the scene in which Portia tells Nerissa that they must adopt men's dress; and the following interchange of pleasantries between Launcelot, Jessica, and Lorenzo. The trial scene, of course, occupied the full stage. The episode that follows, the delivery by Gratiano to Portia of Bassanio's ring, was enacted on the outer part. This gave time for the properties used in the trial scene to be cleared away, and the inner stage to be got ready for the closing scene representing the garden at Belmont.

Some of the details in the above attempt to reconstruct the method of performing *The Merchant of Venice* on the platform stage are uncertain, but the general lines are sufficiently clear. It is interesting and helpful to go through other plays in similar fashion. We thus learn to visualize the action more clearly, and we gain a fresh insight into the principles of Shakespeare's dramatic technique.

In the matter of costumes the Elizabethan stage did not aim at the historical and antiquarian accuracy on which we lay stress in the modern theatre. Greeks and Romans appeared not in classical garb, but in contemporary Tudor dress. But the descriptions of garments in the inventories made by the Office of the Revels suggest that foreign fashions were sometimes reproduced on the boards. In any case there was an abundance of rich and beautiful stuffs, in which Shakespearian characters made as brave a show at the Curtain or the Globe as they have done in the sumptuous revivals at the Lyceum or His Majesty's

Theatre. That the great dramatist himself had a keen eye for details of dress is clear from many passages, such as the comments by Margaret in *Much Ado* (III. iv), on her mistress's wedding-gown, or the interviews with the haberdasher and the tailor in *The Taming of the Shrew* (iv. iii).

The accounts of the Revels Office also prove that there were elaborate stage-properties, and there is little doubt that the simplicity of Elizabethan theatrical arrangements has been exaggerated. But if there was any scenery in the modern sense it was primitive, and we owe many of Shakespeare's beautiful descriptive passages to the necessity for supplementing with word-pictures the crude theatrical devices of his period. Had the art of the scene-painter or the electrician been developed in Elizabethan times Lorenzo might never have descanted on the moonlit loveliness of the garden at Belmont, or Romeo cried from Juliet's chamber :

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain-tops.

It is interesting, as we read the plays, to note the passages where Shakespeare uses his pen as a brush to paint the background for the dramatic action.

It is, however, not only the mechanism of the stage that conditions the playwright's art. He has to take account of the actors who are to interpret his creations. Doubtless Shakespeare, like more recent writers for the theatre, had individual performers in his eye for certain parts. A theatre-goer of the time tells us how he had seen the great tragedian, Richard Burbage, as

Young Hamlet, old Hieronymo,<sup>1</sup>  
Kind Lear, the grievèd Moor.

<sup>1</sup> The hero of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.



TYPICAL ELIZABETHAN COSTUMES OF A MERCHANT, A COURT LADY, A CITIZEN'S WIFE, AND A GALLANT  
From Caspar Rutz, *Habitus variarum orbis gentium*, 1581

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It must have been a spur to Shakespeare's creative energy to know that there was this exceptionally gifted actor at hand to embody his tragic heroes. Similarly for comic parts he could rely upon Will Kemp and Dick Cowley, whose names by a fortunate accident have been left prefixed, in both the quarto and folio texts of *Much Ado about Nothing*, to some of the speeches of Dogberry and Verges. And many of the lovely songs in the plays must have been written for some sweet-voiced boy in the company.

What is harder to realize is that the brilliant series of comedy heroines, and even the tragic figures of Lady Macbeth, Volumnia, and Cleopatra, were created for boy-actors. It is one of these whom Hamlet quizzes, when 'the tragedians of the city' visit Elsinore :

What ! my young lady and mistress ! By'r, lady, your ladyship is nearer heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine.<sup>1</sup> Pray God your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring.

How could boys with 'cracked' voices and no experience of life do justice to the parts that have taxed the genius of a Mrs. Pritchard, a Mrs. Siddons, and an Ellen Terry ?<sup>2</sup>

However this may have been the impersonation of female parts by boys had a strong influence on Shakespeare's plots. When boys appeared as women it was a temptation to devise situations in which they could change into their natural attire. The youthful actors of the roles of Portia and Nerissa felt doubtless more at home in the robes of Doctor Bellario and his clerk than in their feminine garb at Belmont. We can imagine the gusto with which a boy-player would speak the lines :

I'll hold thee any wager,  
When we are both accoutred like young men,

<sup>1</sup> A high-heeled shoe.

<sup>2</sup> See, however, Sir Walter Raleigh's view (*Shakespeare*, p. 120).



I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two  
And wear my dagger with the braver grace,  
And speak between the change of man and boy  
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps  
Into a manly stride.

On the other hand it is odd to think of the boy who played Jessica, when she disguises herself as a torch-bearer, apologizing for the change into masculine attire :

I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me,  
For I am much asham'd of my exchange.  
. . . Cupid himself would blush  
To see me thus transformed to a boy.

Julia, Viola, Rosalind, Celia, and Imogen are other heroines who assume male disguise. It throws light upon Shakespeare's delicate insight into the hearts of women, if we compare the ways in which these maidens comport themselves in 'the lovely garnish of a boy', and the situations which the dramatist creates for the revelation of their sex beneath their doublet and hose.

It is interesting also to try to discriminate between the permanent and the fugitive elements in Shakespeare's art, arising out of this special feature of the Elizabethan theatre. Portia dominating the court in her lawyer's gown ; Rosalind, with a curtle-axe upon her thigh, lecturing Orlando in the forest ; Viola as Cesario, playing love-messenger for the Duke, who has won her heart—these make an eternal appeal to our imagination and our sympathy. But we have ceased to enjoy for their own sake the mistakes arising from confusion of sex, which had an extraordinary fascination for Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Any one who has been at a performance of *Twelfth Night* will have noticed that even the most skilful acting cannot make palatable to a modern audience the passion-

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ate advances of Olivia to Viola in her page's disguise, and that the opportune arrival of her twin brother Sebastian, which looses the tangle, stirs only a languid interest. All this is now decidedly *vieux jeu*, as indeed are some of the tangles arising out of other forms of mistaken identity in Shakespearian comedy. Even the supreme master, though he made the stage-arrangements and conventions of his day serve the purposes of his genius, could not entirely release himself from their hampering influence.

## IV

### *How Shakespeare used his Library*

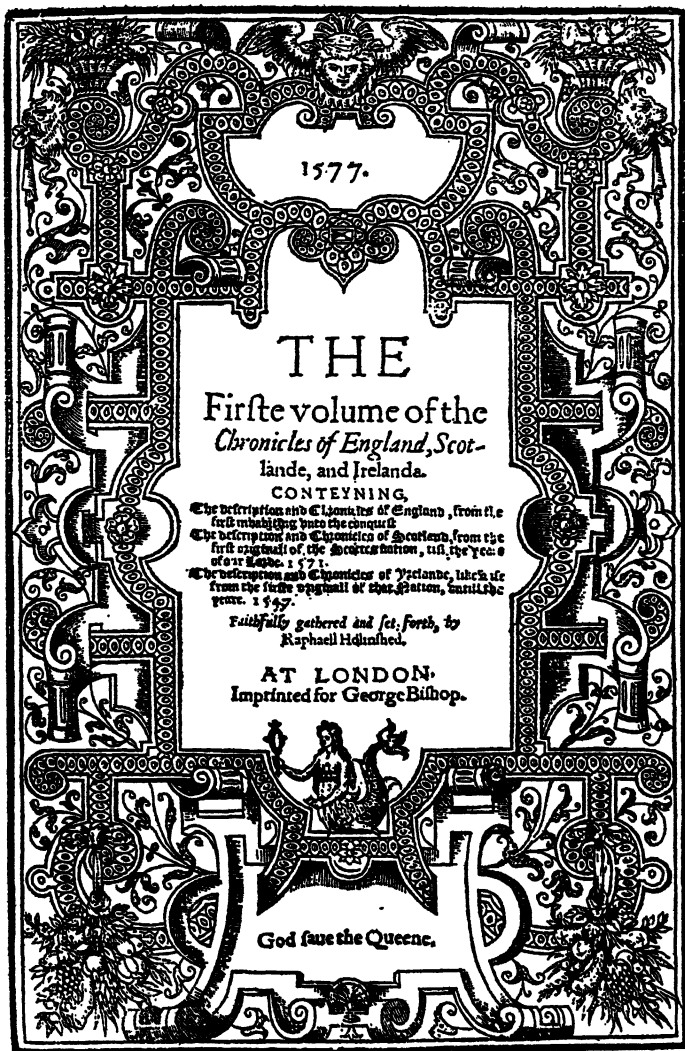
WE have seen that Shakespeare as a practical dramatist had to take account of the conditions of the Elizabethan stage, and of the capacities of the individual members of his company. In these respects he was in the same position as the other playwrights of his time. How then was it that his achievement immeasurably surpassed theirs? So far as an answer can be given at all it is somewhat surprising. Shakespeare's genius, so transcendent and comprehensive, had yet a limitation from which the work of much smaller men is free. He was a unique creator, but not an inventor. He accepted, as has been seen above, the current dramatic types. But this is not all. He did not take the trouble to invent new plots for his plays. Of most of them we know the exact source; in some cases we are not sure which of the various versions of a story he used; only exceptionally, as with *Love's Labour's Lost*, has no original yet been found.

Shakespeare's library does not seem to have been remarkably extensive. Two books in it were evidently his special favourites, and apart from their own merits he has given them immortal glory. One of them is Ralph Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which was the chief source of his English history plays, and also of *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*. The other was a translation by Sir Thomas North of a French version of *The Lives of Eminent Greeks and Romans*, by Plutarch, a Greek writer of the first century A. D. Between them these two books furnished Shakespeare with the plots, wholly or in part, of some dozen plays. Holinshed and Plutarch may make the proud claim of having been, in a sense, his literary godfathers.

If we want to see Shakespeare at work we cannot do better than take a section of Holinshed's *Chronicles* or one of Plutarch's *Lives*, and compare it with (say) *Henry V* or *Julius Caesar*. There is a double interest in so doing. For Holinshed, and still more Plutarch in North's lusty version, are splendid reading in themselves. And when we turn from them to the plays we see how Shakespeare has selected, adjusted, and refined his borrowed material with the finest insight and superb artistry.

Plutarch and Holinshed were not philosophical historians. The one was a biographer, interested chiefly in character; the other a chronicler with an eye for picturesque episodes. Character and events are the stuff out of which drama is wrought, and it was Shakespeare's sure instinct that drew him to writers who could provide him with such splendid raw material. He often uses their very words with the minimum change needed to transmute prose into blank verse—a fact which it is easy and instructive for us to verify. He sees the past through their spectacles, and does not alter essentially their perspective of events, though he gives himself freedom in details, such as dates and ages. Thus Hotspur, in *1 Henry IV*, is made much younger than he was at the time of the Percy's rebellion, that he may be a more effective foil to Prince Hal.

But though Shakespeare treats Plutarch and Holinshed with splendid loyalty, he gives to what he borrows a significance of which they had not dreamt. Many of their anecdotes and descriptions move only on the surface, and deal with what is incidental and haphazard. Shakespeare fuses all that he takes from them into organic unity. Above all he relates events to character. History, in his eyes, is not the resultant of mechanical forces; nor does he see in it, as some modern writers have done, the working of an ironical world-spirit, to whom men are the counters in a gigantic game of hazard. He does not really



Title-page of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (first edition, 1577)

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believe the words that he puts into the lips of the blinded Earl of Gloucester in *King Lear* (iv. i. 38-9):

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods ;  
They kill us for their sport.

In Shakespeare's eyes character is destiny, and the explanation of events is to be found in human motives and impulses. Hence he takes the personages who figure in the pages of Holinshed and Plutarch, and probes deep into their natures. Each is to him at once an individual and a type, intensely alive, yet more consistently fashioned than one of the children of men. The murder of the Princes in the Tower becomes credible when we see it as the crowning outrage of Richard the Crookback, a superman who had learnt all that was worst in the teaching of Machiavelli, as later despots have turned to their own use all that is worst in the teaching of Nietzsche. The failure of the revolutionaries at Rome, who can kill Caesar, but are overthrown by his 'spirit', is traced to its source in the character conflict between the visionary idealist, Brutus, and the practical conspirator, Cassius.

Starting with such examples we may go through the English and Roman history-plays, and trace in each of them the reaction of character upon circumstances. It is here that Shakespeare's distinctive treatment of his historical material is to be sought. His Richards and Henrys, his Roman republicans and imperialists are immortal embodiments of certain human types, transfigured and idealized. Of each of them we may say in Shakespeare's own words :

Thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest.  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.

It is important to remember that it matters not at all whether we accept these portraits as historically true. We may think that Shakespeare has given too ready credence to the tales of infamy which Tudor partisans spread about the last Yorkist King. Or in the glowing figure of Henry V it may be difficult to recognize the persecutor of the Lollards. Again we may hold that even in ancient Rome or medieval England 'the captains and the kings' did not mould events so predominantly as Shakespeare would have us believe, and that he underestimates the influence of mankind in the mass. In the sphere of history or political philosophy these are matters for debate. But they do not concern the Shakespearian student, whose quest should not be accurate knowledge of the past, but the illumination shed by the dramatist upon the master-motives of men.

It was not enough, however, for Shakespeare to endow the figures that he borrowed from Plutarch and Holinshed with richer and more significant life. He associated with them other characters, entirely the coinage of his brain or developed from some incidental allusion. Thus it is that in his pages stately personages from court and council-chamber and army headquarters mingle with representatives of rougher, freer-spoken social grades. Falstaff, Faulconbridge in *King John*, Fluellen in *Henry V*, Menenius Agrippa in *Coriolanus* are almost or entirely unknown to Holinshed or Plutarch, but they add the salt and pungency which are so often lacking in historical plays. It is the besetting danger of this species of dramatic art to be frigid and pompous. Shakespeare's instinct guided him aright, and his example influenced Scott, who in the allied sphere of the historical novel escaped a similar pitfall by introducing a motley array of low-life characters. We cannot do better after reading *Henry IV* or *Henry V* than turn to *Waverley* or *Old Mortality*, and compare the methods of the two great masters.

Another section of his library which Shakespeare turned to his own use was that containing novels and tales by contemporary writers, either original or translated from French or Italian. Concerning this we must put away all ideas of copyright as it exists to-day. It often happens at present that a successful novel is dramatized. Mr. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Miss Margaret Kennedy's *The Constant Nymph* are instances. The adaptation for the stage, though not usually carried out by the author himself, is done with his consent, and sometimes with his collaboration; he shares in the royalties and his name appears on the programme. In the days of Elizabeth when a book was issued from a printing press it became, for literary purposes, public property. Any one could translate or adapt it without acknowledgement or payment to the author. Of all this Shakespeare took full advantage. Two of his most delightful plays are founded upon stories written by contemporaries, who were dramatists as well as novelists. During the lifetime of Thomas Lodge he adapted his novel *Rosalynde*, *Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590), into the exquisite pastoral play, *As You Like It*. About a dozen years later he turned *Pandosto* by his sometime rival, Robert Greene, into the dramatic romance of *The Winter's Tale*. A translation of one of Boccaccio's stories by William Painter in a collection called *The Palace of Pleasure* (1565) furnished the plot of *All's Well that Ends Well*. A version of a tale by another Italian novelist, Cinthio, made by Barnabe Rich—the *Historie of Apolonius and Silla* (1581)—seems to have been the source of *Twelfth Night*. An adaptation in verse by Arthur Brooke, entitled *Romeus and Juliet* (1562), of Pierre Boistean's *Histoire de Deux Amans*, became the basis of *Romeo and Juliet*.

To get an insight into Shakespeare's art and craftsmanship read over one or two of the above plays, and then turn to



their sources. Contrast the fresh charm of the woodland scenes in *As You Like It*, or the rustic fragrance of Perdita's merry-making, with the exotic atmosphere of *Rosalynde* or *Pandosto*. Or watch how the sentimental dalliance of the lovers in Brooke's pedestrian poem flames into the rapture which has made Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet the pattern amorists of all time.

But this is not all. As in the historical plays Shakespeare's prodigal genius could not content itself with enriching what it borrowed; it overflowed into fresh forms of life. The figures that stepped on to his stage from Italianate romances, Romeo and Juliet, Orsino and Viola and the rest, are steeped in the glow and colour of the South. Their desires and languors, their dreams and ecstasies are not fed upon English air. But boisterously elbowing their way among this alien company, overflowing with animal mirth, crowing like chanticleer, throng the children of Shakespeare's own brain, English from head to heel. Mercutio and the Nurse, Sir Toby Belch, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Dogberry and Verges, Feste and Autolycus—the dramatist may place them in Verona or Messina, in Illyria or Bohemia. But we start on a wild-goose chase if we seek for them there. Let us fare forth into the streets of Stratford-on-Avon, the Warwickshire lanes, the cross-timbered houses of Elizabethan London, and they will jostle against us. It was thence that Shakespeare summoned them to be the companions and yoke-fellows in destiny of the 'spirits' of another sort', whose acquaintance he had made within the covers of some favourite romance during his leisure hours.

Sometimes, however, the company at the Globe wanted a play at short notice, or there was a call for a performance at Court or at some great house. Then Shakespeare took a quicker way to satisfy the demand than by working upon materials

taken from histories or novels. An Elizabethan dramatist, if he thought he could improve a play from another hand, had no compunction in laying hold upon it for his own purposes. Shakespeare, like lesser men, adopted this practice, and early in his career was sharply attacked for it by an aggrieved rival, Robert Greene. When Greene denounced him as 'an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers', he was referring, as his parody of a notorious line shows, to *Henry VI*, Part III, founded upon *The True Tragedie of the Duke of York*, of which Greene was part author. *King John*, as has been mentioned, was founded upon an older two-part play, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*. *The Famous Victories of King Henry V* was a minor source of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. This was a crude production, but in the anonymous piece, *The Taming of a Shrew*, and in George Whetstone's two-part play, *Promos and Cassandra*, he found no unworthy forerunners of *The Taming of the Shrew* and of *Measure for Measure*. From *The Chronicle History of King Leir*, printed in 1605, but acted as early as 1594, he took some hints for the most overwhelming of all his tragedies.

All the old plays mentioned above were issued in quarto, and Shakespeare doubtless had his own copies of them. They have been reprinted in various forms, and we can compare them with the works of the great dramatist for which they supplied materials. But Shakespeare in his adaptation of earlier pieces was not confined to the printed volumes in his own library. He could make use of manuscripts which were the property of his theatrical company, and which had never found their way into print. Thus when we find that *The History of Felix and Philomena* is mentioned in the Revels Office accounts as having been acted at Court in 1584, it is possible that Shakespeare knew this piece which treats the same story from

a Spanish romance as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The reference by the pamphleteer, Stephen Gosson in 1579, to the performance of a piece called *The Jew*, 'representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers and the bloody mindes of usurers', clearly suggests that this play, which is otherwise unknown, anticipated *The Merchant of Venice* in combining the caskets and the pound of flesh stories.

There is still stronger reason to believe that *Hamlet* was founded upon a manuscript play. As we have already seen this tragedy can still be read, not only in the complete text of quarto 2 or of the Folio, but in the earlier imperfect version of quarto 1. This quarto raises some of the most difficult problems of Shakespearian criticism, but there is little doubt that it represents imperfectly Shakespeare's first recast of a play on Hamlet by an older dramatist, in all probability Thomas Kyd, which is alluded to as early as 1589. So far as we know this was never printed, and Shakespeare must, therefore, have had some manuscript belonging to the Lord Chamberlain's company before him when he created his tragic masterpiece. This is one of the reasons why *Hamlet* is at once so fascinating and so baffling. Underneath its superb poetry and mature stage-craft we detect the wavering lines of an old-fashioned 'revenge' play. Shakespeare spread the gold of his genius over baser metal, which shows through in parts. As has been said above every reader of *Hamlet* is magnetized into an attempt to interpret it for himself, and it is well worth the making. But we can never hope for a complete solution of the problems that it raises, unless by some miracle we could recover the manuscript which Shakespeare borrowed from the book-keeper of the Lord Chamberlain's company, and read it side by side with the wonderful tragedy for which it gave the cue.

## *Some Features in Shakespeare's Drawing of Character*

IN considering how Shakespeare used his library it has been necessary to say something on his treatment of the characters whom he found in books or manuscripts. We are thus led up to the subject of his characters in general.

To attempt an analysis of Shakespeare's individual dramatis personae, great or small, is obviously outside the range of these pages. Their aim is merely to clear the way for personal study, and to suggest various lines of interpretation or of approach that may be followed up with advantage.

One surprising fact to be noted is that Shakespeare's early plays did not give promise of such an unparalleled fertility of character-creation as was revealed in the maturity of his genius. Had he died before thirty, like Marlowe, no one could have anticipated that he would prove supreme among the literary artists of the world in the faculty of endowing the children of his imagination with independent and immortal life. It has been shown that in his early historical plays he followed the model of Marlowe and others. When he tries his hand at character-drawing in his first comedies he does not make a great success of it. Biron, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, is more the mouthpiece of certain views on the relations of the sexes than a truly dramatic personality. Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a lay-figure, and it aggravates his fickleness that there is so little to choose between Silvia and Julia. The lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are more shadowy than the 'shadows'—the fairy king and queen, and Puck, 'the lob of spirits'; while Theseus and Hippolyta might have step-

ped from some piece of tapestry in a Tudor banqueting-hall. Even Romeo and Juliet are less the scions of the two noble houses of Verona than reeds through which the god of love breathes voluptuous melodies. It was only in his humorists, conscious or unconscious, Bottom, Mercutio, Juliet's nurse, that Shakespeare in his salad days began to find himself as a creator of character. It is for other qualities of his art that we turn to the early plays.

Then somewhat abruptly, after he had been at work some five or six years, Shakespeare's powers of portraiture seem to have grown ripe. *The Merchant of Venice*, with its resplendent galaxy of figures, from the principals to the hangers-on, may serve to mark the beginning of this period of heightened fertility in character-creation. And in the comedies that followed Shakespeare is increasingly prodigal of his wealth of portraiture, especially of women.

It was the dominating part played by Portia and Rosalind, Helena and Isabella, Hermione and Imogen that led Ruskin to make the well-known generalization that 'Shakespeare has no hero, he has only heroines'. The passage will be found in *Sesame and Lilies*,<sup>1</sup> and is provocative of thought, but we have only to turn to the history-plays to see that the dictum is superficial. There the men are in the foreground, and it is only perversity that would refuse the epithet 'heroic', in varying degrees, to Faulconbridge, Hotspur, and King Henry.

But the personages in the histories—except Falstaff, who is not historical—have limitations corresponding with the practical and mundane issues that confront them. In the tragedies men continue to be the predominant figures, apart from Cleopatra, who magnetizes us as completely as she does Antony. They are far more deeply studied than in the histories,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 116-21 of the small edition, originally published in 1882.

and they play out their parts against a horizon that melts into infinity. We are witnesses of an unparalleled revelation of human personality in a titanic wrestle with circumstance.

For almost a decade Shakespeare's genius worked with the dynamic energy of a nature-force, as productive and apparently inexhaustible. But only apparently, for the purely creative impulse slackened, when he turned from tragedy to dramatic romance. The ebbing of the tidal wave is most clearly visible in characters of secondary, or yet more subordinate rank. Leontes and Paulina, Cymbeline and Posthumus, Alonso and Sebastian are not individualized with Shakespeare's full plastic power. Hermione, Imogen, and Autolycus have the authentic stamp of the creations of his prime, but for the rest his rarest mastery is now shown in figures such as Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel, Miranda, and Perdita, who are not characters in the ordinary sense, but beings as much outside the range of normal human experience as the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the evening of his career Shakespeare was no longer predominantly busied with the inquisition into the hearts and wills of men. His gaze relaxed its intensity and strayed, as if with relief, into the fields where supernatural influences and moving accidents by land and sea are of more account than human motives and impulses. To the student of Shakespeare as a creator of character it is the dozen or so of years that lie between *The Merchant of Venice* or *Richard II* and *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Coriolanus* that offer the richest field.

Another way of studying the characters is to single out a representative type, and trace its development from one play to another. Shakespeare took over from the general stock-in-trade of Renaissance drama, which in its turn was a debtor to the classical stage, a number of standard types which became so highly individualized in various of his *dramatis personae*

that it is not always easy to recognize at first sight the affinity between them. Thus his clown or fool is a descendant of the *servus* or slave of Roman comedy, with new features added from the 'Vice' of the allegorical Morality plays and the Jester who was attached to great Tudor households. Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the Dromios in *The Comedy of Errors*, Launce and Speed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice* have all a strong family likeness as knockabout clowns and serving-men. But we do not at once recognize the type when we meet it under the disguise of some other occupation, as in Bottom the weaver, or Autolycus the pedlar, or the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*. Still less when it is sublimated in ascending degrees, in Touchstone, Feste, and the Fool in *King Lear*.

Take again the *Miles Gloriosus* or Braggart Soldier, another classical legacy, but one whose modern representatives were doubtless often to be met in the streets and taverns of Elizabethan London. Parolles, in *All's Well that Ends Well*, is the most conventional specimen of the class in Shakespearian drama. Another Frenchman of more illustrious rank, the Dauphin in *Henry V*, is of the same kidney. But no nation has a monopoly of the type. There is more than a touch of it in the high-flown Spaniard, Don Adriano de Armado, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, while the English Pistol in *Henry V* with his fustian phrases is a lily-livered cur of a peculiarly odious kind. English, too, in spite of his Illyrian domicile, is Sir Andrew Aguecheek, whose poltroonery is robbed of nearly all offence because he is not born to bravado but has it thrust upon him by Sir Toby. And above all there is Falstaff, whose boasting and cowardice are more than half unreal, part of the gigantic imposture with which he confronts the inconvenient facts of life. The distance traversed from Parolles to Falstaff gives us a measure of the

wonderful development of the braggart-soldier type that we owe to Shakespeare's genius.

Another legacy from the classical stage was the tyrant king. Marlowe had thrown a new poetic glamour round him in Tamburlaine. But what Protean shapes does he take under Shakespeare's hands in Richard III, King John, Claudius, Macbeth, and Caesar. Again what worlds away, as we have seen, is Hamlet from the orthodox avenger of blood, and Othello from the conventional jealous husband.

The mention of the Moor suggests another point for consideration. How far did Shakespeare aim at *racial* or *national* portraiture? The question is not easy to answer. Realism, in the sense of accurate reproduction of local or chronological details, was foreign to the spirit of the Elizabethan theatre. The performers, as we have seen, wore, as a rule, the costumes of their own period. Shakespeare's references to the caps and aprons of the Roman mob, as if they were London tradesmen and apprentices, are a well-known illustration of this. And as with outward vesture, so it was in part with inward attributes. Many of the Italians in the plays evidently know the reaches of the Thames better than the lagoons, and have rowed in a ferry more often than they have swum in a gondola. Romeo and Juliet have indeed the southern fever in their blood, and Iago has given villainy the artistic finish peculiar to Renaissance Italy. But Petruchio and Katharine, Bassanio and Portia, Beatrice and Benedick were to be encountered in English county houses or in the court train of Elizabeth. No intelligent Home Office would register them as aliens, or dispute their title to British nationality.

And what of the Illyria of *Twelfth Night*, the Vienna of *Measure for Measure*, the Bohemia of *The Winter's Tale*, even the Elsinore of *Hamlet*? Their inhabitants, for any trace that



they show of local idiosyncrasies, might as well be denizens of Cloud-Cuckoo-Town, Utopia, or Ruritania. The same may be said of the Princess of France and the King of Navarre, with their lords and ladies in *Love's Labour's Lost*; and, with some reservation, of the King of France and the Countess in *All's Well that Ends Well*. But the Dauphin and Orleans in *Henry V* are portrayed as typically Gallic fire-eaters. The Princess in the same play, and Doctor Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with their broken English and their voluble patter in their mother tongue, are French stage figures of a conventional pattern.

Shakespeare is far happier in his portraiture of members of another and nearer Celtic stock than the French. Owen Glendower, Fluellen, and Sir Hugh Evans bear the stamp of their Welsh nationality writ large over them. None of them, indeed, in spite of some stage-directions in *1 Henry IV*, uses a word of their vernacular speech, but the English of Fluellen and Evans has the unmistakable Cambrian smack, and Glendower is an authentic countryman of 'the dreamer Merlin'.

The strain of Celtic mysticism which in Glendower is fantastic and superficial becomes in the Highland chieftain, Macbeth, a haunting, maddening sense of the terrors of the unseen world. Yet the other characters in the play, including his wife, have nothing of the Celt in their composition, nor are Lear or Cymbeline at all like early British rulers. We have only to think of what they would have become in the hands of a Yeats or a Synge to realize this.

It is curious that, except for his Welshmen, the Shakespearian personages with the strongest national touches are Orientals—Shylock, Othello, and Cleopatra. It is impossible to think of any one of the trio apart from their race. The fact that we so often refer to them as the 'Jew', 'the Moor', and 'the

Egyptian', instead of by their names, speaks for itself. But though in these cases Shakespeare makes magnificent dramatic capital out of racial psychology, he does not labour external details with the meticulous accuracy of the modern realistic playwright. Indeed it is just because his method of dealing with nationality is so different from that in fashion to-day, and frankly inconsistent, that it makes so absorbing a study.

Again, if we are interested in the question of Shakespeare's consistency, we may take some of the characters that appear in more than one play, and trace their development under his hands. The pursuit of Falstaff after this fashion is highly exciting. Is the fat knight in *Henry IV*, Part II, quite the same as in Part I, and can he be identified with the Sir John of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*? Or how far can we recognize the Bolingbroke of *Richard II* in Henry IV, or the Prince Hal of Eastcheap in the victor of Agincourt? Can the Antony who sways the mob in the market-place of Rome be recognized in the infatuated victim of Cleopatra's charms? How is the singular picture of Julius Caesar in the tragedy that bears his name to be reconciled with the admiring references to him by Shakespeare in other plays? Whatever answers we may give to such questions we shall probably come to the conclusion that though Shakespeare, when it suited him, was ready to rehandle any of his *dramatis personae*, he had nothing of that paternal interest in the children of his brain which leads some modern novelists to follow their fortunes from youth to age, and from one generation to another, with unfaltering zest. We cannot think of him as the author of an Elizabethan *Forsyte Saga*.

Lastly behind all the detailed lines of study suggested in this chapter looms the inevitable question to which strangely different answers have been given by high authorities. Do any of the characters in the plays 'half reveal and half conceal'

Shakespeare himself? Or is his method in the technical phrase entirely objective? Does he stand apart, in godlike isolation, from the creations of his genius? This is the view taken by Robert Browning, whose own dramatic method was essentially different, in the poem, *At the Mermaid*. Shakespeare is supposed to be addressing his fellow playwrights at the Mermaid Tavern, and protesting, while the sherris goes its rounds, against the idea that in his writings he has unlocked his heart :

Here 's my work ; does work discover  
What was rest from work—my life ?  
Did I live man's hater, lover ?  
Leave the world at peace or strife ?  
Blank of such a record truly,  
Here 's the work I hand—this scroll,  
Yours to take or leave ; as duly  
Mine remains the unproffered soul.

The sentiments here put into the mouth of the dramatist are virtually those of Carlyle and Walter Pater, the latter of whom declared, ' As happens with every true dramatist, Shakespeare is for the most part hidden behind the persons of his creations '. Sir Sidney Lee has championed this view in its extreme form. ' In his work it is vain to look for his biography, for his specific personal sensation. . . . To seek in his mighty drama close-fitting links with the life which he led by his own hearthstone is . . . to misapprehend the most distinctive note of his miraculous gift of genius.' <sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the American essayist, Emerson, asserted that ' Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare. . . . We have his recorded convictions on those questions which knock for answer at every heart.' This view, in more or less

<sup>1</sup> *The Impersonal Aspect of Shakespeare's Art* (English Association Pamphlet, No. 13), pp. 19-20. Sir Sidney quotes the words of Pater, given above.

modified form, has found many supporters. The most elaborate and attractive attempt to find in the dramatist's characters the reflection of phases in Shakespeare's own development has been made by the Irish critic, Edward Dowden, in *Shakspeare's Mind and Art* (1874). The tendency of the latest criticism is on the whole to veer round from this point of view. Nevertheless, we may believe that in certain characters, notably Hamlet and Prospero, whose meditations are of far more import than their actions, the veil wears thin, and that we catch glimpses of the features, and hear echoes of the voice, familiar to the burghers of Stratford and to the fellowship of the Globe Theatre.

## VI

### *Shakespeare's Language*

It is at once an advantage and a drawback to the student of Shakespeare that his language has a comparatively modern air. Any one who wishes to read the earliest memorials of English literature, the epic of *Beowulf*, or the prose of Alfred or Aelfric, must go through a preliminary drill in Anglo-Saxon grammar or vocabulary, as rigorous as is necessary for learning a modern foreign language. Even the student of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or of Wyclif's tracts needs initiation into the distinguishing features of Middle-English before he can read them with ease and to full advantage. But any one can open his 'Shakespeare', and find himself, in the matter of language, more or less at home, much as he does with the Authorized Version of the Bible, which is just five years ahead in time of the First Folio.

This is, of course, in the main, an incalculable benefit to the English-speaking race. What would have been our loss had Shakespeare been contemporary with Dante, and had his genius found expression in a form of English which has now become obsolete. His plays would have been banished from the theatre, the fireside, and the 'lady's lap' (where Lyly wished his *Euphues* to lie), and would have been open only on the lecturer's desk or beside the student's lamp.

Yet the modern look of Shakespeare in the 'Globe' or 'Oxford' edition is, to some extent, deceptive, and may be at times a cause of stumbling. We have in the first place to remember that we do not read the plays exactly in the form in which they were written. Take, for example, the opening lines of the chorus in *Henry V*, Act iv. This is how they appear in the First Folio:

Now entertaine coniecture of a time,  
When creeping Murmure and the poring Darke

Fills the wide vessell of the Vniuerse.  
From Camp to Camp, through the foule Womb of Night,  
The Humme of eyther Army stilly sounds ;  
That the fixt Centinels almost receiue  
The secret Whispers of each others Watch.  
Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames  
Each Battaile sees the others vंबर'd face.

In the first place we notice that in the Folio text 'i' takes the place of 'j', initial 'v' of 'u', 'u' of 'v', and sometimes 'y' of 'i'. Many nouns begin with a capital letter. Final consonants are sometimes doubled, e.g. 'vessell', and 'e' is often added at the end of a word, e.g. 'entertaine'. In 'Humme' all three points are illustrated. Certain words vary in other ways from their present spelling, e.g. 'Battaile' and 'Centinels'. The apostrophe as mark of the possessive case is omitted, e.g. 'others'.

It is evident, therefore, that the text with which we are now familiar has been edited to make it more easily understood by modern readers. In the main the changes are merely formal, and are confined to details of spelling and punctuation. They do not as a rule affect the meaning or the rhythm of the verse. Yet they are not negligible, for sometimes the modernization of spelling obscures the sense, especially in passages where Shakespeare, after the fashion of his day, indulges in play upon words.

Take, for instance, Antony's cry, as he stands beside the body of Caesar (III. i. 207-8) :<sup>1</sup>

O world ! thou wast the forest to this hart ;  
And this, indeed, O world ! the heart of thee.

The transition from the image of Caesar as a hart, or deer, entangled in the forest of the world, to that of him as the heart,

<sup>1</sup> The references throughout this chapter are to the lines as numbered in the 'Oxford' one-volume edition.

or centre of the world, seems much less forced in the Folio, where the spelling is 'hart' in both cases.

Earlier in the same play Cassius protests indignantly against Caesar's monopoly of power (I. ii. 153-6) :

When could they say, till now, that talk'd of Rome,  
That her wide walls encompass'd but one man?  
Now is it Rome indeed and room enough,  
When there is in it but one only man.

Here the whole point of the two last lines hangs on the fact that 'room' was spelt 'Roome' and was pronounced like the name of the town.

In *Much Ado about Nothing* (II. i. 305-6) Beatrice speaks of Claudio as 'civil as an orange'. The jest is lost, unless we know that in Shakespeare's day a Seville orange was written 'civil orange'.

In *Twelfth Night* (I. iii. 99-107) there is the following dialogue between Sir Andrew Aguecheek, chafing at the ill-success of his wooing, and Sir Toby Belch :

*Sir And.* I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O! had I but followed the arts.

*Sir To.* Then hadst thou had an excellent head of hair.

*Sir And.* Why, would that have mended my hair?

*Sir To.* Past question; for thou seest it will not curl by nature.

To most readers or listeners in the theatre Sir Toby's repartees here are meaningless. We do not appreciate their point till we realize that 'tongues' (i. e. languages) and 'tongs' (i. e. here, curling-tongs) were pronounced alike, and had interchangeable forms of spelling.

In other cases where Elizabethan and modern spelling are the same, difficulties arise owing to changes in pronunciation only. We cannot, of course, reproduce the pronunciation of Shake-

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Shakespeare's contemporaries as accurately as phonographic records will transmit the current speech of to-day to future generations. But we know that the sounds of the vowels were much closer than at present to those in French or German, and that some of the consonants, e.g. 'l' and 'r', were drawn out in utterance, and had almost the value of semi-vowels. It is interesting to take some familiar passages from the plays, and to compare the rhythmical effect of their delivery in older and modern pronunciation. In some places Elizabethan pronunciation is necessary for the sense.

Thus in *Henry IV*, Part I (II. iv. 262-70), Prince Hal and Poins press Falstaff to give his 'reasons' for one of his monstrous inventions. The knight retorts: 'Give you a reason on compulsion! if reasons were as plenty as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I.' The comparison of 'reasons' with blackberries loses its point, unless we remember that the pronunciation was like that of 'raisins' to-day.

In *Much Ado about Nothing* (II. iii. 56-60), when Balthasar is asked for an 'encore' of a song, he protests:

Note this before my notes;

There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting.

Don Pedro exclaims:

Why these are very crotchets that he speaks;

Notes, notes, forsooth, and nothing.

To appreciate the full word-play here we have to realize that 'not' and 'note', and 'noting' and 'nothing' were similarly pronounced.

Later in *Much Ado* (III. iv. 53-5) Beatrice sighs 'Heigh-ho'. Margaret, her maid, asks whether it is 'For a hawk, a horse, or a husband'. Beatrice retorts, 'For the letter that begins them all, H'. The point of this lies in the identity of pronunciation



of 'h' and 'ache' in Shakespeare's time. Hence the plural of 'ache' is a disyllable as in *The Tempest* (i. ii. 369-70), where Prospero threatens Caliban :

I'll rack thee with old cramps,  
Fill all thy bones with aches.

The above are some illustrations of the difficulties that arise from changes in spelling and pronunciation since the plays were written.<sup>1</sup> But the reader is more frequently held up by words and phrases that have gone out of use altogether. These include many technical terms connected with such amusements as falconry or bowls. Thus in *Twelfth Night* (III. i. 72-3) Viola says that a professional Fool should

like the haggard, check at every feather  
That comes before his eye.

Her meaning was plain to those who had often seen an untrained hawk strike at any bird that crossed its path, instead of keeping on straight after its quarry. In the same way frequenters of the bowling-green, much more numerous then than now, would have had no difficulty in appreciating the significance of Faulconbridge's outburst in *King John* (II. i. 574-6) against 'Commodity' as

the bias of the world :  
The world, who of itself is peized well,  
Made to run even upon even ground

till 'this vile-drawing bias' deflects its course, after the fashion

<sup>1</sup> It has recently been suggested by Mr. St. John Ervine that Gratiano's outburst (*Merchant of Venice*, IV. i. 122-3)

Not on thy soul, but on thy sole, harsh Jew  
Thou makest thy knife keen

was more easily intelligible to an Elizabethan audience than it is now, because there was a difference of pronunciation between 'sole' and 'soul'.

of the unevenly weighted bowl. If modern dramatists were in the habit of drawing metaphors from cricket and football, and if these amusements lost their vogue, future readers of their plays would feel the same difficulties as we do with passages such as these.

Unlike falconry and bowls, music has as many votaries now as in Tudor times, but many of the instruments have changed, and also the technical terms. Hence Shakespeare's musical allusions often have to be explained. When Sir Toby says of Sir Andrew that 'he plays o' the viol-de-gamboys'; when Hamlet uses a recorder to confound Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; when Leontes chafes at the sight of Hermione 'still virginalling', i.e. playing the virginal on Polixenes' palm, the names of the instruments are all unfamiliar to the reader of to-day. And what will he make of Rosalind's query in *As You Like It* (i. ii. 150-1), when she hears that the Duke's wrestler has disabled his opponents, 'Is there any one else that longs to see this broken music in his side?' We do not now, like the Elizabethans, speak of music arranged in parts as 'broken music'. Nor do we call a voice intermediate between treble and bass a 'mean', as in the following dialogue between Lucetta and Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (i. ii. 87-93):

*Luc.* And yet me thinks I do not like this tune.

*Jul.* You do not?

*Luc.* No, madam; it is too sharp.

*Jul.* You, minion, are too saucy.

*Luc.* Nay, now you are too flat,  
And mar the concord with too harsh a descant:

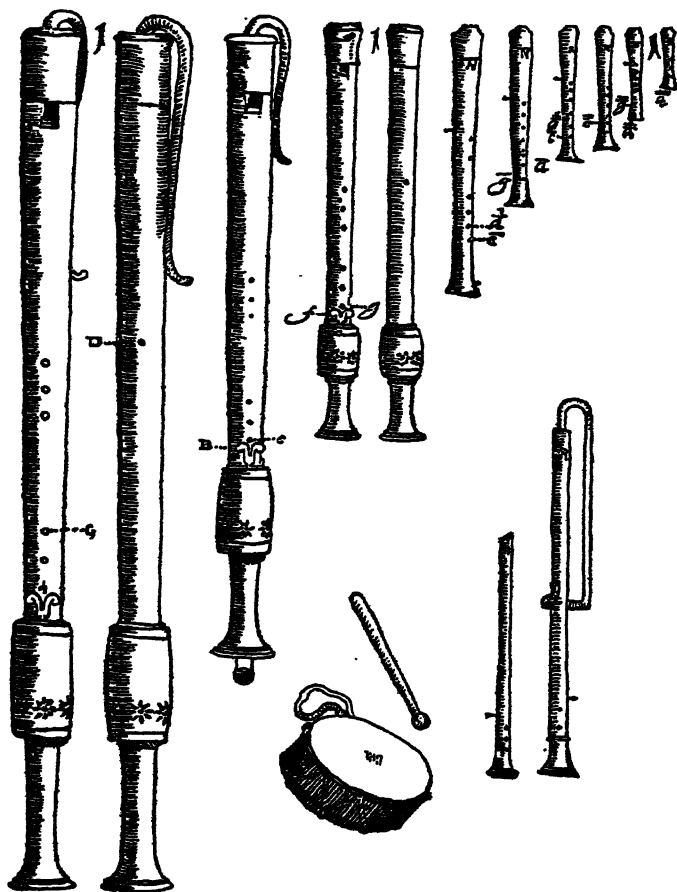
There wanteth but a mean to fill your song.

*Jul.* The mean is drown'd with your unruly bass.

'Descant' is also used above in an obsolete technical sense to denote the melody sung upon a ground, to which it forms the



A Recorder (from Virdung, *Musica getutscht*, 1511)



Flutes, Pipes, and Tabor (from Praetorius, *Theatrum Instrumentorum*, 1620)

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air. Another Elizabethan musical term was 'division', i. e. the execution of a rapid passage of melody. It is with this that Juliet tearfully makes play, when the dawn summons Romeo from her side (III. v. 29-30) :

Some say the lark makes sweet division ;  
This doth not so, for she divideth us.

The dances also, of which Shakespeare makes frequent mention, are mostly different from those known to us to-day. Take, for instance, the following lines from *Love's Labour's Lost* (III. i. 8-14) :

*Moth.* Master, will you win your love with a French brawl ?

*Arm.* How meanest thou ? brawling in French ?

*Moth.* No, my complete master ; but to jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary to it with your feet. . . .

The modern reader is even more mystified than Armado till he learns that 'brawl' was a country dance of French derivation ; and 'canary' a lively Spanish dance, hailing originally from the Canary Islands.

In *Much Ado* (II. i. 77-8) Beatrice warns Hero that 'wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace'. The sting of the comparison lies in the character of the three dances. The Scotch jig was a wild round-dance ; the measure was staid and formal ; the cinque-pace had five steps, 'like the tottering and uncertain steps of old age'.

Again the names of the coins mentioned in the plays are usually different from those familiar to-day, and Shakespeare often puns upon them, as in *Henry IV*, Part II (I. ii. 187-91) :

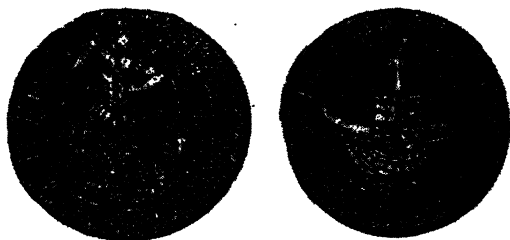
*Ch. Just.* You follow the prince up and down, like his ill angel.

*Falstaff.* Not so, my lord ; your ill angel is light, but I hope he that looks upon me will take me without weighing.

The fat knight adroitly interprets 'angel' as the gold coin,

worth about ten shillings, which would not pass if it fell below a certain weight.

When Benedick says that the woman who is to come into his grace must be 'noble, or not I for an angel', he is punning upon 'angel' and another coin, the 'noble', worth about 6s. 8d. The mark, worth 13s. 4d., is often mentioned, and the reader has to make acquaintance with various coins of foreign origin, the 'ducat', the 'denier', and the 'doit'.



An 'Angel'.

The legal terminology which Shakespeare plentifully uses is another source of difficulty. It would seem as if the ordinary Elizabethan reader and theatre-goer were better acquainted with law-phrases than the corresponding class to-day. At any rate Shakespeare, and other dramatists, expected them to seize the point of technical allusions, which are now unfamiliar outside of the Inns of Court and solicitors' offices. What modern playwright would have put into Hamlet's mouth these reflections on the skill of a lawyer (v. i. 105-15) :

Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? . . . This fellow might be in's time a great buyer

of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries ; is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt ?

Here, as so often in the use of technical phrases, Shakespeare adds to their difficulty for modern readers by playing upon words, as in 'the fine of his fines', where 'fine', in the singular, means 'end', and 'fines' is the term in conveyancing.

For an explanation of the obsolete or peculiar words, which have been broadly classified and illustrated above, and of the still more numerous miscellaneous difficulties of phraseology that confront him, the student will naturally turn to an annotated edition or a glossary to Shakespeare's works. When, for instance, in *Hamlet* he comes across such a line as 'unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd' (I. v. 77), or a phrase like 'miching mallecho', or a word like 'eisel', he realizes at once that they need interpretation.

But there is another type of words more likely to mislead the reader just because they do not at first sight present any difficulty. Many nouns, adjectives, and verbs while the same in form as in Shakespeare's days have considerably changed their meaning. Unless this is borne in mind the sense of a passage will often be misunderstood. A common instance of this is the word 'presently', which now means 'shortly, after a while'. In Elizabethan English it has the sense 'instantly, at once'. *The Tempest* (iv. i. 41-3) provides an admirable example. Prospero tells Ariel that he is going to show Ferdinand and Miranda 'some vanity of his art':

*Pro.* It is my promise  
And they expect it from me.

Ar. Presently ?

*Pro.* Ay, with a twink (i. e. in the twinkling of an eye).

Among the adjectives which generally or sometimes have a different meaning from that current to-day are 'close' (secret),

'fond' (foolish), 'nice' (dainty or subtle), 'sad' (serious), while 'old' and 'dear' had various intensive uses. Verbs which are similarly noticeable are 'abuse' (deceive), 'allow' (approve), 'censure' (form a judgement of), 'learn' (teach), 'owe' (own), 'possess' (inform), 'prove' (test), 'tell' (count), though they have sometimes their modern meanings. Such nouns as 'fact' (crime), 'favour' (appearance), 'injury' (insult), 'purpose' (meaning), 'success' (result, good or bad) are apt to trip up the unwary. And it is curious that the names of two vices should have undergone a subtle change. By 'envy' the Elizabethans meant malice, and by 'jealousy' what we now call suspicion. Othello is ruined not through jealousy of Cassio, but through suspicion of his wife. Thus through a change of verbal meaning we are here actually in danger of misconceiving the motive of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies.

There are many other features in which the language of the plays differs from modern English, but to deal with them would involve a discussion of Shakespearian grammar, which is in itself a wide subject. It is enough here to mention the free use of one part of speech for another; the retention of participial and other forms that were becoming antiquated and are now obsolete; the employment of double comparatives and superlatives, and of the double negative as a strong affirmative; the frequent use of a singular verb before a plural noun. English syntax was far more fluid and elastic than it has become through the stereotyping influence of three centuries of printed books. And beyond changes in vocabulary and grammar there remains the problem of the sinewy and gnarled style of Shakespeare's later plays, where the difficulty lies in the packing of the thought into the closest space:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly.

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What could be simpler than these words in which Macbeth begins to ponder on the murder of Duncan, and what a weight of meaning do they bear ? There is no master-key to unlock the secrets of such language, bare and massive as granite-rock. To grasp them fully needs a gift of divination given to few, but patient and loyal study will go far. And whoever has felt the fascination of such study will realize that Shakespeare's language offers almost as boundless a field of interest as his characters or his dramatic technique.



## VII

### *Shakespeare's Poems, Sonnets, and Songs*

IN the preceding chapter we have considered some features of Shakespeare's language which, on their own account, are highly interesting to students of philology and of the history of the English tongue. But the ordinary reader would not give them much attention had not Shakespeare woven them into supremely beautiful patterns of verse and prose. Just as he turned to unique use the books which lay open to all, and the ordinary stage conditions of his time, so it was with the forms of speech which were the common inheritance of himself and his fellows. It was because Elizabethan English became in his hands so glorious an instrument that Wordsworth invoked it as a symbol and bulwark of national liberty :

We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake.

With regard to Shakespeare's verse we have, in the first place, to remember that he was not only a playwright, but, in the formal sense, a poet. His fame during his lifetime was based far more than is usually realized on his two verse-narratives, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, published in 1593 and 1594, and dedicated to a noble patron, Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton. They were received with flattering enthusiasm. Six editions of *Venus and Adonis* were called for between 1593 and 1602, and five of *Lucrece* between 1594 and 1616. The critics of the day paid them glowing tributes. Thus Richard Barnfield wrote in 1598 :

And *Shakespeare* thou, whose hony-flowing Vaine,  
(Pleasing the World) thy Praises doth obtaine ;  
Whose *Venus*, and whose *Lucrece* (sweete and chaste),  
Thy Name in fames immortal Booke have plac't.

The only partly dissentient voice was that of a Cambridge

dramatist, the author of *The Return from Parnassus* (1603), who, while praising his 'heart-throbbing line', urged Shakespeare to try a graver subject instead of 'love's foolish lazy languishment'. But it was just this that gave the poems their wide appeal. Their handling, at once realistic and sentimental, of sexual passion in a classical setting had something of the same attraction as the erotic analysis in certain types of French and Russian novel and their English counterparts has to-day. By the modern reader, whose palate has been educated to a more subtle psychology, and a more unflinching realism, Shakespeare's 'honied' vein in these poems will be found cloying. The generation that has welcomed Mr. Masfield's *The Everlasting Mercy* and *The Widow in the Bye-Street* will not be inclined to linger over *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*.

Yet the two poems, apart from their incidental felicities of phrase and description, have enduring interest for all students of Shakespeare's relation to antiquity, and of his management of rhymed verse. *Venus and Adonis* is written in six-lined stanzas, rhyming *ababcc*, and for nearly two thousand lines it runs with a swinging gait, partly due to the skilful intermixture of double rhymes. In *Lucrece* Shakespeare used the 'rhyme-royal' or seven-lined stanza rhyming *ababbcc*, which was a favourite of Chaucer, and is employed by Spenser in some of his minor poems. On the whole Shakespeare manages it with less success than the six-line stanza. It has a greater tendency to drag, and the passages of reflection and description, though more highly wrought than in *Venus and Adonis*, make too much the impression of 'purple patches'.

If time has robbed Shakespeare's narrative poems of much of their attraction, it has made amends by adding to the fascination of his Sonnets. First mentioned by Meres as in private circulation among the dramatist's friends in 1598, they were



# VENVS AND ADONIS

*Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flavus Apollo  
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua.*



LONDON

Imprinted by Richard Field, and are to be sold at  
the signe of the white Greyhound in  
Paules Church-yard.

1593.

Title-page of the unique copy in the Bodleian Library of the first edition  
of *Venus and Adonis*

published piratically by Thomas Thorpe in 1609 with an enigmatical dedication to 'their only begetter, Mr. W. H.' As no new edition appeared till 1640<sup>1</sup> they evidently did not hit the taste of the day like *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, and for long they were comparatively neglected. But since the later nineteenth century they have been studied as devoutly, and with as great a conflict of views, as *Hamlet* itself. Many issues have been raised of interest mainly to specialists, but there are three aspects of the Sonnets to which attention may here be briefly called.

First, and most important, is their sheer poetic beauty. Meres spoke of them as Shakespeare's 'sugared' sonnets, but the epithet is misleading. It is true that some of them are written in the 'honied' vein of the poems, but this is not characteristic of the series as a whole. Sweetness is there, but it is blended with the other, rarer elements that go to the making of great poetry. The Sonnets are freighted with beauty rich and strange, with haunting melody, with brooding and impassioned thought. To open them even at random is for most readers to surrender at once to their indefinable, talismanic spell. Does Shakespeare draw his imagery from the oldest of poetic themes, the changes of the seasons or the hours? Listen to the opening of Sonnet XVIII :

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate :  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date :

or of XXXIII :

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy :

<sup>1</sup> In an edition (so-called) of Shakespeare's *Poems*.

or of LXXIII :

That time of year thou mayest in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

Now turn to the group that tells of the ' triumph of Time ' over all things save the poet's verse. Take Sonnet lx, beginning :

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end ;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend :

or LXV :

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,  
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,  
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
Whose action is no stronger than a flower ?

Or we may compare Sonnet cxvi, canonizing love at its purest :

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments,

with cxxix, exposing its counterfeit in its hideous nakedness and power :

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action.

And then turn to cxlvi, where soul and body are again set in sharpest contrast, and the former is exhorted to ' Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross '.

There are many who will be content to go no further, to say with Lorenzo in the gardens of Belmont :

Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears.

But others will wish to trace the relation of Shakespeare's Sonnets to other Renaissance sonnet-sequences, English or

foreign, and to compare them with the sonnets of later masters of this poetic form. The Shakespearian series is the highest achievement in the English type of sonnet, consisting of three alternatively rhymed<sup>4</sup> quatrains followed by a couplet (*abab, cdcd, efef, gg*). The clinching or epigrammatic effect of the couplet at the close sharply distinguishes the English from the Italian form, which is specially associated with the name of Petrarch. The Petrarchan sonnet consists of an octave (*abba, abba*) followed by a sestet, usually rhyming *cde, cde*, and always avoiding a final couplet. Its melodic effect has been compared to a wave, flowing in the octave, and ebbing in the sestet.

It is remarkable that Petrarch and not Shakespeare has set the model for nearly all English sonneteers since the Elizabethan period. Perhaps if the Sonnets had been included in the Folios, and thus been circulated with the plays, they might have had a more potent influence. But the next English sonneteer of the highest rank, Milton, was an ardent Italian scholar, and adopted the Petrarchan form. Milton, when the sonnet came again into vogue during the Romantic Revival, inspired Wordsworth, who varied, however, in some points from his model. Later nineteenth-century sonneteers, such as Rossetti and Mrs. Browning, wrote under direct Italian influence. Rossetti's sonnet-sequence, *The House of Life*, distinctively Italian in technique and atmosphere, offers many interesting points of comparison with the Shakespearian English series.

Wordsworth, though a disciple of Milton, knew Shakespeare's Sonnets also, and declared that 'with this key' he 'unlocked his heart'. Browning retorted that 'if so, the less Shakespeare he'. Are the Sonnets autobiographical or not? The question is one that has excited the keenest controversy.

The Sonnets fall into two groups, 1-126 and 127-54. The first group is addressed to a young nobleman, of great personal

beauty, whom the poet urges to marry and beget children to perpetuate his fairness. This idolized friend and patron wounds the poet deeply by robbing him of his mistress, and by transferring his favour to a rival writer. There is a period of estrangement and separation, followed by reconciliation. The second group is addressed to the mistress, dark and uncomely, who has proved unfaithful with the poet's friend, but who by her powers of fascination and her musical gifts still sways Shakespeare's heart.

Are the noble patron, the dark mistress, the rival poet real personages, or the story, almost or entirely, a 'make-believe'? One set of critics, headed by Sir Sidney Lee, laying stress upon the features common to the Sonnets and other similar sequences, English or foreign, and upon resemblances between them and situations in the plays, maintains the fiction theory. Another school (to which the present writer belongs), impressed by the coherence of the story, by the intimate personal touches, and above all by the ground tone of poignant and overwhelming emotion, sees in the Sonnets an autobiographical revelation, though with an imaginative colouring. The further problem of identifying friend, mistress, or rival cannot be discussed here. In the editions of the Sonnets and in the biographies mentioned in the Bibliography the student can make his choice of conflicting views. And even if he feels bewildered by the claims of rival candidates he will get many curious sidelights on Elizabethan life and literature.

Outside the 1609 quarto Shakespeare has left ten sonnets: seven in *Love's Labour's Lost*, two in *Romeo and Juliet*, and one in *All's Well that Ends Well*. They are early work, and none of them is of high poetic value. The 'rhyme royal', used in *Lucrece*, is not found in the plays, but the earlier ones sometimes employ the sextain of *Venus and Adonis*, and more frequently

the quatrain. Rhymed couplets are, of course, also abundant in most of the earlier plays, and till nearly the end of his career Shakespeare used them for special purposes, as in epigrams, aphorisms, and to mark the close of scenes. But as a whole it may be said that the couplet is alien to his genius. Even in the Sonnets the closing distich has often the least touch of his verbal magic. Among the host of lines from the plays that have become part of current speech there are very few couplets. One of the most familiar is Hamlet's cry, re-echoed by pessimists in every age (I. v. 188-9) :

The time is out of joint ; O cursed spite !  
That ever I was born to set it right !

But of all Shakespeare's rhymed verse there is none that makes so instant and universal an appeal as the exquisite lyrics scattered through the plays. Ever since Noah's wife in the Chester Miracle pageant sat drinking with her gossips, and carolling 'The flude comes fleetinge in full faste', songs have been a feature in English drama. Even minor Elizabethan playwrights had the secret of throwing off these magical trifles with apparently effortless ease. Some of Shakespeare's songs, like those of his fellows, are merely incidental and lose nothing when detached from their context, and given modern musical settings. Such are the two songs at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, of *Ver*, the Spring,

When daisies pied and violets blue ;  
and of *Hiems*, Winter,

When icicles hang by the wall ;  
the serenades in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (iv. ii) :

Who is Silvia ? what is she ?  
and in *Cymbeline* (II. iii) :

Hark ! hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings ;



the pages' duet in *As You Like It* (v. iii) :

It was a lover and his lass ;

and the Clown's ditty at the close of *Twelfth Night* :

When that I was and a little tiny boy.

Others are specially appropriate to the singer or to the situation in which they are introduced. The song in *Much Ado* (II. iii) :

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,

prepares the way for the trick by which Beatrice is represented to be sighing in vain for Benedick ; while the deserted Mariana's heart must be wrung by the poignancy of

Take, O take those lips away

in *Measure for Measure* (IV. i). So too the song of ' willow ', of the forsaken maid, Barbara, haunts Desdemona on the eve of her own hapless doom. Love's cruelty, seen in another light, is the theme of the song ' old and plain ',

Come away, come away, death,

wherewith Feste in *Twelfth Night* (II. iv) charms the ears of the sentimental Duke, Orsino. The songs of Amiens in the Forest of Arden (*As You Like It*, II. v and vii),

Under the greenwood tree,

and

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,

breathe the very spirit of the woodland. Ariel's ditties in *The Tempest* (I. ii and v. i),

Come unto these yellow sands,

and

Full fathom five thy father lies,

and

Where the bee sucks, there suck I,

have the magical note of the enchanted island.

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These songs of Ariel, with the lovely dirge in *Cymbeline* (iv. ii),

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,

and the light-hearted tinker's catch of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* (iv. ii),

When daffodils begin to peer,

are among the last ' heirs of ' Shakespeare's ' invention '. It is remarkable that while his blank verse in the ' dramatic romances ' had shed most of its lyrical quality his rhymed lyrics were never more fragrant, never so ethereal. Had Shakespeare not written a line of dialogue his songs and sonnets would make him secure of his place on Parnassus.

## VIII

### *Shakespeare through Three Centuries*

WHEN the student has begun to find his way about the plays of Shakespeare, and to form his own impressions and have his individual preferences, he will soon wish to know something of what, during the three centuries since the publication of the First Folio, men of succeeding generations have thought and said about the dramatist and his work. He will then find that, though there is no time in which he has not been held in honour, there have been strange fluctuations of opinion about various aspects of his art, and a constant shifting of the perspective from which it has been viewed.

During his lifetime his reputation probably rested as much on his poems as on his plays, the majority of which did not appear in print till seven years after his death. And though he is spoken of with warm appreciation he is not regarded as in any sense unique—scarcely even as *primus inter pares*. Thus John Webster, himself a master in the tragic art, writing in 1612 when Shakespeare's career was nearing its close, speaks of 'other men's worthy labours, especially 'the full and heightened style' of George Chapman, the 'labor'd and understanding works' of Ben Jonson, the 'no less worthy composures' of Beaumont and Fletcher, and lastly 'the right happy and copious industry' of Shakespeare, Dekker, and Heywood. Here Shakespeare is mentioned in the same breath as a number of other contemporary playwrights, and has to share with Dekker and Heywood the honours of a single complimentary clause.

It was in the 'commendatory' verses prefixed to the First Folio that Ben Jonson, though his own conceptions of dramatic art were essentially different, and though he could on occasion

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pungently criticize his great rival's technique, paid the first glowing tribute to the universality of Shakespeare's genius :

Triumph, my Britain ! thou hast one to show,  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time.

While these lines of Jonson have been resounding in men's ears for three centuries, it is curious that some verses written soon afterwards in no less fervent strain have only recently been brought to light. They were addressed to the editors of the First Folio, Heminges and Condell, by a reader who recognized that they had gained for England a more precious prize than the *conquistadores* had won for Spain :

But you have pleased the living, loved the dead :  
Raised from the womb of earth a richer mine  
Than Cortes could with all his Casteline  
Associates ; they did but dig for gold,  
But you for treasure much more manifold.<sup>1</sup>

Milton, too, must, as a young man at Cambridge, have been an eager reader of the First Folio, for when the Second Folio appeared in 1632 it contained a noble eulogy from his pen, written in 1630 :

What needs my Shakespear for his honour'd bones  
The labour of an age in piled stones ? . . .  
. . . Thou our fancy of it self bereaving,  
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving ;  
And so sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

But it may be noted that his lovely youthful poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* suggest that to him Shakespeare was rather the poet of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*

<sup>1</sup> The lines are facsimiled in full, in the original spelling, on page 79.



than of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. It is the cheerful man who hies to the well-trod stage if

Jonson's learned sock be on,

or

Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

The pensive man, the lover of tragedy, must seek his satisfaction in classical plays,

Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine.

And when in his old age Milton himself made in *Samson Agonistes* his one great venture in tragedy, he achieved a masterpiece for which we have to seek a parallel not in *King Lear* but in the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus or the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles.

Men of genius like Jonson and Milton, though their principles of dramatic art were alien from those of Shakespeare, could recognize and acclaim his greatness. But there was a narrower type of academic mind, influenced partly by the traditional hostility of the universities towards the professional actor, that found Shakespeare poor stuff when compared with the cultured Ben or the modish Fletcher. Such a one was William Cartwright, a distinguished Oxford scholar and dramatist, who wrote a splendid eulogy of Jonson, and poured scorn on Shakespeare in some commendatory verses on Fletcher :

Shakespeare to thee was dull, whose best jest lies  
I' the ladies' questions and the fools' replies :  
Old fashioned wit which walked from town to town  
In turned hose, which our fathers called the clown.

Cartwright's strictures on Shakespeare as a writer of comedy are echoed a generation later by the diarist Samuel Pepys, who, after visits to the theatre, called *Twelfth Night* a 'silly play' and *A Mid-*

*summer Night's Dream* the most 'insipid ridiculous play that ever he saw in his life'. On the other hand, he thought *Macbeth* 'a most excellent play for variety' and was 'mightily pleased' with *Hamlet*, unlike the contemporary diarist, John Evelyn, who wrote in November 1661, 'I saw *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, played, but now the old plays begin to disgust this refined age'. But even in the 'refined age' of the Restoration the genius of Dryden, like that of Jonson and of Milton, though it followed a new dramatic model in the 'heroic play', realized the unique quality of Shakespeare. 'He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. . . . He needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature: he looked inwards and found her there.'

Nevertheless Dryden did not hesitate either alone or in collaboration to adapt several of Shakespeare's plays to the taste of his own time, and he states that two of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were acted throughout the year for one of Shakespeare's. It was therefore probably not only due to the Civil War and the Puritan régime that followed that there was an interval of more than thirty years between the Second and the Third Folio. This, when it appeared in 1663, differed very little from its predecessor, but a second impression of it in the next year included seven additional plays for which Shakespeare's authorship was thus claimed. Only in one of them, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, first published in quarto in 1609, is there any reason for thinking that Shakespeare had a hand. But when the Fourth Folio appeared in 1685 they were again included. It is significant that, soon after the publication of the 1664 folio with the additional plays, the Bodleian Library at Oxford sold

its presentation copy of the First Folio for a small sum to a bookseller, but was fortunate enough to be able to buy it back in 1906 at a cost of £3,000.

With the dawn of the eighteenth century the demand began for an edition of Shakespeare in a new form. In the England of Queen Anne men felt far removed from the Elizabethans, 'the giant race before the flood'. The form of the stage and theatrical conventions generally had materially changed. The language of the dramatist had become antiquated, and the meaning of many of the words and phrases used by him had been forgotten. Hence the need was felt for an edition of the plays adapted to the requirements and understanding of the age. This was first supplied in 1709 by Nicholas Rowe, poet laureate and dramatist, in six octavo volumes. Rowe's text was based mainly on that of the Fourth Folio, and he shows very little acquaintance with earlier editions. But he introduced changes which have left their mark on succeeding editions till our own day. He divided each play on a uniform principle into Acts and Scenes. He prefixed a list of dramatis personae, and added stage directions marking exits and entrances. He modernized spelling, punctuation, and grammar. He thus smoothed the path for eighteenth-century and later readers. But misled by his knowledge of the conventions of the contemporary theatre, which differed in many ways from those of the Elizabethan platform-stage, Rowe went at times astray in his scenic divisions; and in his indications of locality at the opening of scenes he attempted a precision which was foreign to the conceptions of Shakespeare's day, and which has been a stumbling-block to his successors.

First of these was the poet Pope, with his edition in six quarto volumes in 1725, and he was followed by others who brought to the interpretation of the dramatist literary gifts or knowledge



of men and affairs. Such in different ways were Sir Thomas Hanmer, formerly Speaker of the House of Commons, whose illustrated Oxford edition appeared in 1744; and Dr. Johnson who completed an edition in eight volumes in 1765, with a notable preface. But it was to another series of eighteenth-century editors, men of antiquarian knowledge and critical acumen, that we owe the real beginnings of Shakespearian textual emendation and reconstruction. They included Lewis Theobald, Edward Capell, and George Stevens, whose editions appeared in 1733, 1768, and 1773. The Irish scholar, Edmund Malone, in his edition of 1790 and in the manuscript notes which were used after his death for a revised 'variorum' edition in twenty-one volumes in 1821, added greatly to the knowledge of Elizabethan stage history, and helped to determine the order in which the plays were written.

While critics and editors were thus at work for the reading public a series of great actors and actresses from the Restoration to the early years of the nineteenth century were interpreting Shakespearian characters to theatre-goers. Thomas Betterton, the chief actor of the Restoration period, was supported in his production of many of the plays at Drury Lane by his wife, who was the first woman to embody a series of Shakespeare's heroines, who had been presented, as has been seen, in his own day by boys. Betterton had an even more illustrious successor at Drury Lane in David Garrick, who by his histrionic genius and his dominant personality held an unprecedented sway over the London stage from 1741 till his death in 1779, though, as we have been told, 'he acted Macbeth in a bagwig and Hamlet in a contemporary court dress'. Associated with him were a group of eminent actresses, Mrs. Clive, Mrs. Cibber, and Mrs. Jordan. Their fame was, however, eclipsed later in the century by that of Mrs. Siddons, England's greatest tragic

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actress, who performed with her brother, J. P. Kemble. Edmund Kean's début at Drury Lane in 1814 was the beginning of a more natural and impassioned school of acting. Coleridge said that to see him act was 'like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning'.

This arresting phrase is typical of the 'Romantic' criticism of the early nineteenth century, of which Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt are the chief mouthpieces. They were not specially interested in textual problems, or in the antiquities of the Elizabethan theatre. It was the poetry and the thought, the character-drawing and the action in the Shakespearian plays that made the deepest appeal to them, and which they interpreted with the intuition and sympathy of genius. Coleridge did more than any one to show the organic unity of action in the plays, and to dispel the idea of their 'irregularity'. Lamb conveyed to others his exquisite sense of the felicities of 'specimen' scenes and passages. Hazlitt had a particular gift for the divination of character. Each of them in his own way has enriched our critical literature with illuminating utterances in which every succeeding generation of Shakespearian students finds a revelation of beauties of craftsmanship and portraiture which it might otherwise have passed unheeded by. And their work of aesthetic or philosophic interpretation has been carried on in Victorian and later days by Swinburne and Dowden, Dr. A. C. Bradley, and Sir Walter Raleigh.

Shakespearian biography does not come within the limits of this *Introduction*. It will be sufficient therefore here to name John Payne Collier (though he forged a number of documents), J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, F. J. Furnivall, F. G. Fleay (though his speculations were often wild), Sir Sidney Lee, Professor C. W. Wallace of Nebraska, U.S.A., and Mrs. C. C. Stopes as investigators who have in various ways made the chief additions



DAVID GARRICK



MRS. SIDDONS

to our knowledge of the life and surroundings of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

The editorial labours of Rowe and his successors were continued in the nineteenth century by Alexander Dyce in his nine-volume edition (1857), by W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright in the Cambridge edition (1863-6), also in nine volumes, and by Howard Furness of Philadelphia in his 'variorum' editions of individual plays. In all of these the text and critical apparatus were based upon a full collation of the original folios and quartos. In his Clarendon Press series from 1868 onwards Aldis Wright also sought to meet the new demand for handy volume editions of individual plays for school and college use. They have had many successors, freighted with a less weighty store of scholarship, but more adaptable to practical class-room purposes.

Of recent years the editing of Shakespeare has entered upon a new phase. A more intimate study has been made of the conditions in which Elizabethan plays were printed and published. Extant manuscripts of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and successors, some of which were 'prompt copies' used in the theatre, have been minutely examined. The result of these investigations, as has appeared already in Chapter I, is that the condemnation by Heminges and Condell of the quartos as 'stolne and surreptitious copies' is now taken with very great qualification. Some of these quartos, now bluntly labelled 'bad', deserve the hard words of the Folio editors. But a larger number, equally tersely called 'good', are seen to be of first-class authority. And it is increasingly believed that these 'good' quartos and some of the folio plays were printed direct from Shakespeare's own autograph manuscripts, in some cases used as 'prompt copies'. Hence in textual emendation the features of Elizabethan handwriting and the forms of the letters, which differed in important respects from those of the

present day, are now taken into much greater account than before. Moreover, while the punctuation of the original texts was disregarded by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors, a strong case has been made out for retaining this punctuation as having a rhetorical and not, as in our own days, a grammatical basis. Different views are taken by scholars on some of these questions, but they have given an added interest, not to say excitement, to many readers of Shakespeare. The student who wishes to know something about these new methods of textual interpretation will find them illustrated in the volumes of *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, which are at present being published.

The progress of research has also introduced new phases of Shakespearian production in the theatre. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Sir Henry Irving, with Ellen Terry as his leading lady, and Johnston Forbes-Robertson as his *jeune premier*, made the Lyceum take the traditional place of Drury Lane as the head-quarters of Shakespearian drama. Irving mounted a dozen of the plays with unprecedented spectacular magnificence and archaeological exactitude. His example was followed at the Haymarket and afterwards at His Majesty's Theatre by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. In opposition to the methods of Irving and Tree a band of students of the Tudor theatre, headed by Mr. William Poel, founded the Elizabethan Stage Society for the production of the plays according to the more unsophisticated conventions and the simpler setting of the platform stage. While it cannot be said that their propagandist efforts have ever succeeded in 'drawing the Town', they have influenced the work of other 'producers', such as Mr. Granville-Barker at the Savoy, Mr. Fagan at the Court, and Miss Baylis at the 'Old Vic'. This South London theatre, where Miss Thorndike and Miss Edith Evans have in turn adorned their

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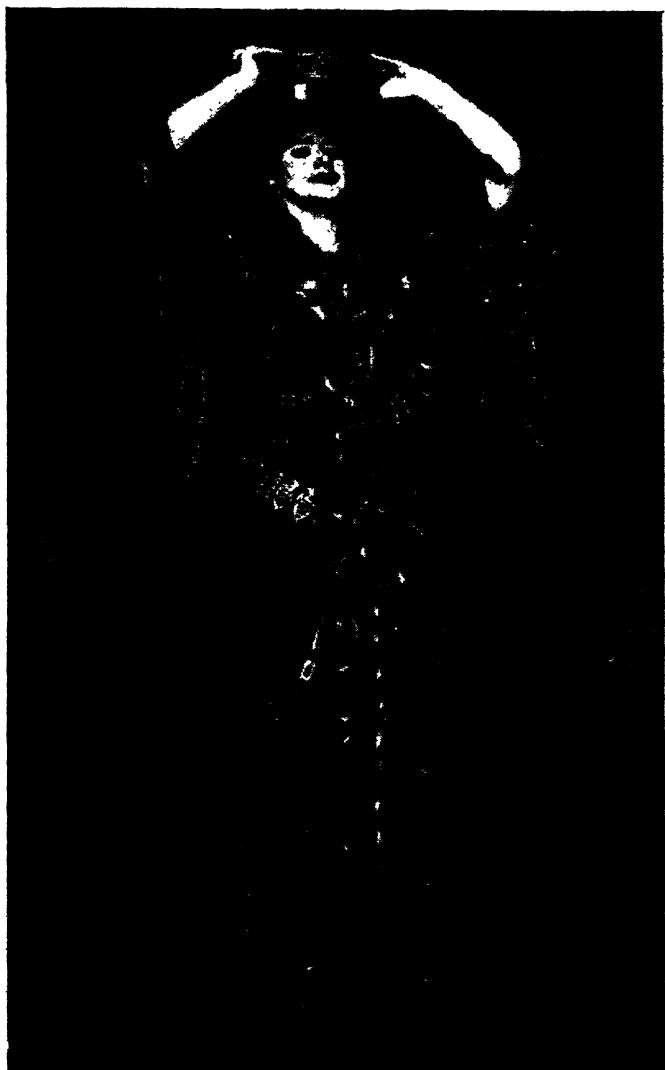
art, has the distinction of having put on the boards every play in the Shakespearian canon.

Quite recently a novel method has been set on foot by Sir Barry Jackson, who has produced *Hamlet* with the dress and properties of the present day, and has already stimulated others to tread the same tempting though hazardous path in pursuit of 'actuality'. Whatever their personal preferences may be, students will do well to visit and compare the effects of performances according to the different methods.

'When the producer', it has been recently said, 'approaches such a work as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night*, he may very well resolve to give his own reading of the play, just as the orchestral conductor resolves to give his own reading of a Beethoven symphony. And it is just this individual reading that is valuable.'<sup>1</sup>

For a long time the Shakespearian flag was kept flying in the provinces chiefly by Sir Frank Benson and his company, who also from 1887 till a few years ago gave the annual festival performances at Stratford-on-Avon, amid the associations of the dramatist's native town. More recently Repertory Theatres, such as that at Birmingham, have provided a home for Shakespearian drama. But in addition to these professional enterprises there has been of late a remarkable revival of the amateur community acting which was widespread in medieval and Tudor England. Such bodies of players as those associated with the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich, Citizen House, Bath, and the Bradford Industrial Theatre have by their performances of Shakespearian plays brought them peculiarly home to their fellow citizens and neighbours. From the British Drama League, with its monthly journal, its library, its conferences, and national festivals of community playing, they can obtain

<sup>1</sup> Ashley Dukes: *Drama* (Home University Library), p. 154.



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counsel and support. A new and attractive avenue to familiarity with the dramatist's works has thus been opened.

For those who have not the opportunity of taking part either as actors or as spectators in these community productions there are Shakespeare societies which provide opportunities for co-operative study and discussion. The first 'Shakespeare Society' was founded in 1841 and lasted till 1853. It was followed in 1874 by 'The New Shakspeare Society', which had a longer life of about twenty years. Both of these societies issued a number of important publications. They have been followed by others constituted on a more popular basis, such as The Elizabethan Literary Society, The Shakespeare Association, and The British Empire Shakespeare Society.<sup>1</sup> These and other societies, in different ways, offer help and stimulus to the Shakespearian student. Through their means he need not plough a lonely furrow, but can find 'a joy in widest commonalty spread'.

<sup>1</sup> See further, Appendix III.



## IX

### *Shakespeare To-day*

IN the preceding chapters it has been assumed that the reader was anxious to study Shakespeare, and wished for some guidance and the clearing of difficulties from his path. We have taken for granted that Ben Jonson was a true prophet in his 'commendatory' verses prefixed to the First Folio :

Triumph, my Britain ! thou hast one to show,  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time.

The quotation from Carlyle at the head of the first chapter seems to confirm fully Jonson's forecast, as do the closing lines of Matthew Arnold's sonnet on Shakespeare :

All pains the immortal spirit must endure,  
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,  
Find their sole voice in that victorious brow.

And recently a statesman, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, has paid his homage to the dramatist in a striking avowal :

'When I went out of office after eleven years of it, very tired, and for the time not fit for anything, I spent some weeks alone in the country. During that time I read, or re-read, several of Shakespeare's plays. The impression produced upon me by his incredible power and range was really that of awe ; I felt almost afraid to be alone in the room with him—as if I were in the presence of something supernatural.'<sup>1</sup>

It is disconcerting to turn from these tributes to a famous passage in Charles Darwin's *Autobiography*. Here one of the few Englishmen who in his own sphere takes rank with Shake-

<sup>1</sup> *The Fallodon Papers*, p. 9.

speare, and whose influence has been predominant on modern thought, has deliberately placed it on record that after a certain age he turned from the plays in disgust :

‘ Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds . . . gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. . . . But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry : I have tried lately to read Shakespeare and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.’<sup>1</sup>

Darwin, as thus described by himself in 1881, was the remarkable embodiment of an imaginative picture drawn by Browning in his early poem, *Paracelsus* (1835). Browning represents the Renaissance scientist as dominated by ‘one tyrant all-absorbing aim’ :

I cannot feed on beauty for the sake  
Of beauty only, nor can drink in balm  
From lovely objects for their loveliness ;  
My nature cannot lose her first imprint :  
I still must hoard and heap and class all truths  
With one ulterior purpose : I must know !

As a confession by the historical Paracelsus or any other Renaissance scholar this may be considered an anachronism, but the classic example of Darwin proves that it is no fanciful interpretation of a phase of the modern scientific temper. The withering effect on the imagination of the purely analytical

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Francis Darwin, vol. i, pp. 100-1.

habit of mind is a factor that must prevent too sanguine an estimate of the universality of Shakespeare's appeal to-day.

We must also take account of another influence, at the opposite pole to the scientific, which tends to divert the interest of a certain class of readers away from Shakespeare. The effect of the Anglo-Catholic religious revival on important branches of English culture is to promote the study of the Middle Ages rather than the period of the Reformation and the Renaissance. Shakespeare is a man, *the* man, of this period. His work is the supreme manifestation of the mundane, humanist spirit of the Renaissance. Even his philosopher-prince is occupied with the practical problem whether life is worth living,

To be, or not to be, that is the question,

rather than with the ultimate mysteries of the supersensual world. These were the main concern of medievalism, and in Dante's *Divina Commedia* they found sublime poetic interpretation. The growing enthusiasm for the study of Dante in England is significant. There are not a few to whom his apocalypse of the unseen world makes a more moving and intimate appeal than Shakespeare's multi-coloured panorama of life between the cradle and the grave. It is to a kindred impulse that we owe the quickened interest in early English religious drama, which brings to performances of Miracle plays or of Moralities, like *Everyman*, audiences as alert and appreciative as the *habitués* of Shakespearean revivals. This interest extends also to modern imitations of medieval religious and allegorical plays, such as *Eager Heart* and *Christ in Flanders*. And a notable feature of the widespread celebration in this country of the seventh centenary of St. Francis of Assisi in 1926 has been the popularity of performances of Mr. Laurence Housman's 'little plays' on the saint and his associates.

Political movements also are not without their effect on the study of the dramatist. As has been seen he was so far conservative that he accepted the Tudor political organization as he found it, with the Crown as the centre of national life. He was tenacious of all inherited rights, material or otherwise, and good-humouredly contemptuous alike of ideologues and crowds. Hence he has often been in ill favour with 'advanced' thinkers, eager for social reconstruction. A century ago the English Radical, William Hazlitt, noted that he had 'a leaning to the arbitrary side' of political theory, and 'spared no occasion of bating the rabble'. Some fifty years later the American democrat, Walt Whitman, denounced him as 'incarnated uncompromising feudalism in literature'. Early in the present century the Russian idealist reformer, Leo Tolstoi, attacked him even more bitterly as the friend of the rich and powerful, and the enemy of the poor and oppressed. If ever a Bolshevik régime were established in England on the ruins of the present social order, Shakespeare, as its mightiest product, would doubtless be placed on the new *index expurgatorius*. This has in fact already happened in Moscow and Leningrad, where some of his works, with those of Schiller and other 'pre-revolution' masters, have been adapted 'to bring them into line with the economic developments of the present time'. Nor should he fare much better, in spite of his alleged aristocratic temper, with the devotees of an unbridled autocracy. All his 'supermen'—Richard III, Macbeth, Coriolanus—fall headlong through their ambition or their pride. *Realpolitik*, which subordinates all moral considerations to the material advantage of the State and its rulers, find no countenance in Shakespearian drama.

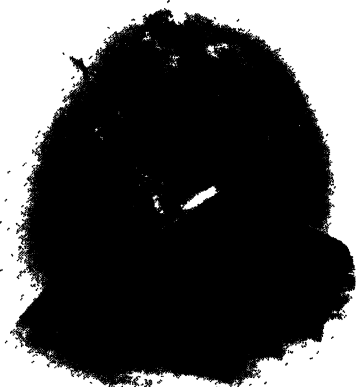
It is not unimportant to bear in mind that there is no anticipation by Shakespeare of the important part now played

by organized labour. Workers, when not plying their trade, are merely idle creatures, as in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*, or a mob liable to be the prey of smooth-tongued demagogues, like Jack Cade or the tribunes in *Coriolanus*. Such a conflict between labour and capital, each with its own case and its accredited representatives, as is presented in Mr. Galsworthy's *Strife*, is outside the purview of Shakespearian drama. In it, too, local government, which has an increasingly important role to-day, appears in a contemptible or ridiculous light. Shallow is a by-word for a fussy and addle-pated justice of the peace : Dogberry and Verges, the Constable and the Headborough, as they are called in the original texts of *Much Ado about Nothing*, bring disgrace upon their ancient and honourable offices. And Shakespeare's attitude is all the more striking as his father had been Bailiff or Mayor of Stratford-on-Avon, and the Tudor period was marked by the growth of the activities of local officials.

Movements in thought sooner or later react upon literary forms and fashions. The scientific impulse gave birth to the keener psychological analysis of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and his followers. They delight to probe into abnormal shades of mentality and emotion, and to trace the complex interrelation of body and spirit. This is not the Shakespearian method, which is a process of divination, of piercing at once to essentials, and which is magnificently careless about detail. 'The impact of Ibsen' (in Mr. Bernard Shaw's phrase) with his severely economic stage-craft has made modern audiences impatient of loose ends, and opened their eyes to the weaker points in Elizabethan dramatic technique, such as the soliloquy and the display of verbal wit for its own sake. They have learned, too, that heredity and environment count for more than was recognized by Shakespeare, and they have

become preoccupied with the problem of woman's position and influence. Ardent admirers of *The Doll's House* or *Man and Superman* are prone to look askance at *The Taming of the Shrew* or even *Much Ado about Nothing*. Yet Tanner's attitude to Ann Whitefield in Mr. Shaw's play is not unlike that of Benedick to Beatrice. Benedick's diatribes against matrimony become in Shavian jargon: 'Marriage is to me an apostasy, profanation of the sanctuary of my soul. . . . Shameful surrender, ignominious capitulation, acceptance of defeat.' Even the Shavian conception of the life-force, whereof individuals are merely the instruments, has a light-hearted anticipation in Benedick's jest, 'the world must be peopled'. Shakespeare deals in the main with clear-cut issues, not with complicated and tangled moral and social problems. Thus though he shows the conflict between patriotism and pride in *Coriolanus* and between patriotism and friendship in *Brutus*, he unfolds no such network of competing 'loyalties' as is set out in Mr. Galsworthy's play of that name. Still less is he concerned with the strange inconsequences of character and conduct that appeal to Russian dramatists like Tolstoi and Tchekov, or with the half-lights and perplexing cross-purposes of the 'relativity' drama of the Italian Pirandello.

With the change in dramatic method and focus there has been a corresponding change in form and diction. As poetry was the natural speech of the romantic stage, so the realistic theatre of to-day finds its medium in prose. It is to prose that the modern ear is more and more attuned by the domination of the novel and the newspaper. So far as it welcomes verse it is mainly in rhymed form, and in short lyrical flights. For blank verse, especially on the stage, it has an instinctive distaste. Plays wholly or mainly in this metre, even by writers of genius, such as Tennyson's *Becket*, Browning's *Strafford*, Mr. Hardy's



HENRIK IBSEN



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*Dynasts*, though performed with success, have not become part of the standard theatrical repertory. It is significant that Edmond Rostand's poetic play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, won a triumph in England in a prose translation, and that two contemporary poets, Mr. John Drinkwater in *Abraham Lincoln* and *Mary Stuart*, and Herbert Trench in *Napoleon*, chose prose as the chief medium for historical dramas. In all these cases Elizabethan precedent would have demanded blank verse. It is noteworthy, too, that Messrs. Rubenstein and Clifford Bax have recently written a play about Shakespeare entirely in prose, and that the fine blank verse spoken by Queen Elizabeth in Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* did not make it a stage success. Account for it how we may the metre that in the hands of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Fletcher thrilled the frivolous gallants and rough 'prentices of three centuries ago has now lost most of its power of popular appeal.

Nor is this all. There have been recently developments in the art of entertainment that threaten not only the poetic play, but all drama that depends for its chief effect on the spoken word. The triumphant progress of the cinema, alluring only through the eye, and attracting masses of young people who will be the playgoers of the future, is destined to have an increasingly potent influence. Attempts have already been made, doubtless well-intentioned, to exploit Shakespeare for the film. As if any sordid murder story from the Newgate Calendar would not do as well for this purpose as *Macbeth*, robbed of the rhythmic pomp and brooding imagination that make it what it is. And in a sphere of art far other than the cinema, the spell cast by the Russian ballet, wherein dancing and mimicry, music and painting, each has its part, proves the magnetism of a type of theatrical entertainment which abjures the aid of speech. Greek drama, if the traditional theory is still to be accepted



at any rate as partly true, grew out of the choric dances in honour of Dionysus. Is the twentieth century to see the process reversed, and choreography superseding dialogue on the stage? <sup>1</sup>

If 'the pictures' and dancing threaten the integrity of Shakespearian drama from one angle, the 'wireless' assails it from another. The appeal to the ear alone is as destructive of the organic unity of its life as the appeal only to the eye. The actor, who was to Shakespeare 'the abstract and chronicle of the time', becomes merely 'a voice', and some who do not love his calling are already making the fantastic claim that we are to look to the wireless studio for the salvation of dramatic art.

Even the advance in popular education during the last half-century has been for a time of doubtful service to Shakespearian study. English literature was long neglected in the schools, and when Shakespearian plays began to be included in the syllabus they generally formed an examination subject. Hence much of the attention that should have been given to the poetry and the characterization was diverted to philological and other notes. The result was that many boys and girls left school with an aversion for Shakespeare akin to the antipathy for the Classics begotten by the traditional system of education, which Byron voiced in his apostrophe to 'Horace, whom I hated so'.

And greatest of all obstacles to the appreciation of poetic drama has been the growing absorption of all ranks of society, during the century and a half since the industrial revolution, in material progress. It was for this that Matthew Arnold arraigned the England of his day :

We, too, say that she now—  
Scarce comprehending the voice

<sup>1</sup> A 'rehearsal' of scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* was recently presented by the Russian Ballet at His Majesty's Theatre, and 'was most successful in amusing the audience'.

Of her greatest golden-mouth'd sons  
Of a former age any more—  
Stupidly travels her round  
Of mechanic business, and lets  
Slow die out of her life  
Glory, and genius, and joy.

The world-war, however, has proved that England is other than the 'weary Titan' of Arnold's vision. The spiritual energies liberated and set in motion by the stupendous conflict have fostered a poetic revival, which has had among its fruits a quickened and more widely spread enthusiasm for Shakespearian drama. We have felt anew that in it are embodied the cardinal, indestructible elements of English, indeed, of all true Western, civilization. This was vividly expressed in the remark of W. H. Page, the American Ambassador in London during the war, that the allies were 'fighting for Shakespeare'. The view of Whitman and of Tolstoi that Shakespeare was essentially anti-democratic has been pushed to its logically absurd conclusion by those who have sought to claim him as a mouthpiece of Prussiaism. The fact is, as we have seen, that he accepted the political system of his day, under which England had risen to unexampled greatness in peace and war. But his art and his interpretation of life are independent of that, or any other, political system. Whatever modifications are wrought by Time in the outward framework of society its essential constituents remain the same. The imperial Britain of George V is very different from 'the precious stone set in the silver sea' of Elizabeth and James, but the ideals of personal conduct are the same, and the same relations, lovely and unlovely, exist between man and man. Even were the present social structure shattered and remodelled to the heart's desire of Mr. H. G. Wells the Shakespearian personal values would remain constant.

To Shakespeare, royalist though he was, it is in one sense, and that the deepest, of no consequence whether you be king or clown, gentle or simple, rich or poor. The one thing needful is that your part should be worthily played. Of what avail is a crown, if you have carved your way to it through blood, like Richard III; or are 'a vice of kings', like John or Claudius; or sup nightly on supernatural terrors like Macbeth? Better far be the faithful fool in *Lear*. And so throughout the complex relations of life all that is counterfeit and unworthy is exposed to scorn or punishment. The causelessly jealous husband, like Leontes; the fickle wife, like Gertrude, who in two months can forget her 'Royal Dane'; the heartlessly unfilial son or daughter, like Edmund, Goneril, and Regan; the vainglorious, posturing cavalier, like Hotspur and Laertes; the inflated self-important menial or Jack-in-office like Malvolio and Dogberry—one and all meet with their deserts. And on the other hand rises a radiant company—Hamlet and Henry V, heroes of thought and action; Orlando and Ferdinand, patterns of the true lover; Portia, Beatrice, and Rosalind, ideals of buoyant and bewitching womanhood; Cordelia and Desdemona, love's martyrs, that wear victorious palms.

'Not until God make men of some other metal than earth' will such types of human personality, good and evil, wise and foolish, cease to exist. They are not generated by forms of government, and changes in these will not bring them to an end. Hence the portraits that Shakespeare drew under the autocracy of the last Tudor and the first Stuart have not lost their truth of outline or their freshness of colour through the political revolutions of three hundred years. Will this be so three hundred or one hundred years hence with the minutely observed, scrupulously modelled figures of our contemporary realistic drama? Or with the inevitable passing of the conditions

which explain their idiosyncrasies, will they become as dead, save to the professed literary student, as the 'humours' which Ben Jonson studied so deeply and exploited on the stage of his day with such success? We cannot tell, but we have the assurance that Time will touch Hamlet and Macbeth no less gently with his wing than Achilles and Hector, still, after three thousand years, the exemplars of martial prowess to those who have fought almost within hail of Hellas and of Troy.

Wisely did the Greeks make Homer the basis of education for the young. Shakespeare cannot fill entirely the same place to-day, for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were revered not only as poetic masterpieces and sources of moral inspiration, but as manuals of divinity. The Bible, therefore, occupies for the modern world a large part of the sphere once filled by Homer. But outside this sacrosanct province Shakespearian drama is an inexhaustible fount, whence the life of the commonwealth may be purified, sweetened, and invigorated. To turn this priceless heritage to full account should be a prime aim of national education. With the spread of more enlightened methods of teaching literature there is good reason to hope that school lessons on Shakespeare will be the beginning, not the end, of continuous and enthusiastic study of his work. And the rapidly growing custom of supplementing the instruction in the class-room by visits to performances of the plays should encourage familiarity at an early age with the beauty of Shakespearian verse. Hence may, perhaps, spring a revived popular appreciation of its magic. In any case, to those who have learnt something of its secret, it is a source of pure and unfailing joy. And in one respect more fortunate than the Elizabethans we can prolong our delight by passing from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes*, or *The Cenci* and *Prometheus*

*Unbound*, and thus realize the inexhaustible variety of colour and cadence in blank verse as a dramatic instrument.

Nor should the place rightly given to science in the modern educational curriculum necessarily be antagonistic to Shakespearian study. The foremost men of science to-day do not undervalue the humanities, or the need for cultivating the imagination. The attitude of Darwin in later life towards poetry, and Shakespeare in particular, though not unique, will probably be less and less typical. In any case the spirit of scientific investigation has done invaluable service to Shakespearian study in many ways. It has checked the exuberance of Romantic criticism, whose ardour of admiration did not always stop short 'on this side idolatry'. The theory of development transferred from biology to literature has taught us that there was a growth of Shakespeare's 'mind and art', and that his work, like that of lesser men, has its phases and its periods. Investigations into the mutual relation of the folio and quarto texts, into the history of the early theatrical companies, with the characteristics of the Elizabethan stage and their influence on the plays, have been carried out by methods similar to those employed in the natural sciences. There has been, in fact, a 'higher criticism' of Shakespearian drama, akin to that of the Bible. And the result has been in both cases the same—a deeper reverence based not on tradition or sentiment, but on knowledge and understanding.

For when all has been said it still remains true, in the words of Coleridge, that Shakespeare keeps 'in the highway of life'; he has an unfaltering eye for the true perspective and proportion of things. Soaring imagination and loyal fidelity to fact; the whirlwind of passion and inviolable law are combined in his work in unparalleled union. It is herein that he is set apart in lonely grandeur from even the greatest of his fellows. Unlike

him they do not see life steadily, and see it whole. Marlowe's heroes are consumed in the fires of their passion for the infinite, whether of power, or knowledge, or treasure, or loveliness. Ben Jonson's characters are not flesh-and-blood creations but a marvellous assortment of the 'humours', the whimsical peculiarities, which have a part in each of us, but of which none of us is entirely composed. Beaumont and Fletcher, with their exquisite poetic gifts, and their mastery over dialogue and plot, lie under an obsession whereby life is transformed into a vast network of amorous intrigue, a rose-mesh of sensuous desire. And so, with one and all, with Dekker and Chapman, with Webster and Middleton, it could be shown of each of them that he fails, in the full sense, to hold the mirror up to nature. This is what Shakespeare does, alike in tragedy, comedy, and 'history', and that is why each succeeding generation sees therein, though from a varying angle, its own lineaments. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and the movements of the human spirit cannot be controlled, even by the most august of names. But through whatever adventures and experiences the English drama and the English theatre may hereafter be destined to pass, they must always come back to Shakespeare—Shakespeare of whom in truth it was foretold that he would prove a 'treasure much more manifold' than all the mines of Peru and Mexico, than 'all the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind'.

## APPENDIX I

### DATES OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS AND POEMS

[The titles of works which are only in part by Shakespeare are printed in italics.]

#### I

#### QUARTOS

- 1593. Venus and Adonis.
- 1594. Lucrece.  
*Titus Andronicus.*
- 1597. Richard II.  
Richard III.  
Romeo and Juliet (imperfect).
- 1598. Henry IV, Part I.  
Love's Labour's Lost.
- 1599. *The Passionate Pilgrim.*  
Romeo and Juliet.
- 1600. Henry IV, Part II.  
Much Ado about Nothing.  
A Midsummer Night's Dream.  
The Merchant of Venice.  
Henry V (imperfect).
- 1602. The Merry Wives of Windsor (imperfect)
- 1603. Hamlet (imperfect).
- 1604. Hamlet.
- 1608. King Lear.
- 1609. The Sonnets.  
Troilus and Cressida.  
*Pericles.*
- 1622. Othello.
- 1634. *The Two Noble Kinsmen.*

## II

## 1623. THE FIRST FOLIO

This did not contain the Poems, *Pericles*, or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It gave for the first time the full text of *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and included the following plays not previously published :

The Tempest.  
The Two Gentlemen of Verona.  
Measure for Measure.  
The Comedy of Errors.  
As You Like It.  
The Taming of the Shrew.  
All 's Well that Ends Well.  
Twelfth Night.  
The Winter's Tale.  
King John.  
*Henry VI* (the three Parts).  
*Henry VIII*.  
Coriolanus.  
*Timon of Athens*.  
Julius Caesar.  
Macbeth.  
Antony and Cleopatra.  
Cymbeline.



## APPENDIX II

### A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Lists of books for more advanced study will be found in *A Shakespeare Reference Library*, by Sir Sidney Lee and Sir E. K. Chambers (English Association Pamphlet, No. 61), and in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. v, pp. 426-72.]

#### TEXT OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

- (a) One-volume editions: [1] The 'Globe' edition, ed. W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright (Macmillan). [2] The 'Oxford' edition, ed. W. J. Craig (Clarendon Press).
- (b) Editions of the single plays, with introductions and notes: [1] The 'Arden' edition, various editors (Methuen). [2] The 'Eversley' edition, ed. C. H. Herford (Macmillan). [3] The 'Temple' edition, ed. I. Gollancz (Dent). [4] The Old Spelling Shakespeare, ed. F. J. Furnivall and W. G. Boswell-Stone (Chatto & Windus). [5] The New Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. by Sir A. Quiller-Couch and J. Dover Wilson: Ten plays have been published (Cambridge University Press).
- (c) Editions of the Sonnets: [1] Ed. H. C. Beeching (Ginn). [2] Ed. E. Dowden (Kegan Paul). [3] Ed. T. G. Tucker (Cambridge University Press).
- (d) *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*: ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Clarendon Press).

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Onions, C. T., *A Shakespeare Glossary* (Clarendon Press).

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Chambers, Sir E. K., *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Clarendon Press).

Onions, C. T. (Editor), *Shakespeare's England*, 2 vols. (Clarendon Press).

Thorndike, A. H., *Shakespeare's Theater* (Macmillan).

Wilson, J. D., *Life in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge University Press).

### APPENDIX III

#### SOME SOCIETIES FOR READING AND STUDYING SHAKESPEARE AND HIS PERIOD

- The British Empire Shakespeare Society. (Arranges readings and performances in London and branches throughout the Empire.)
- The Elizabethan Literary Society. (Meets for evening readings and lectures at King's College, London.)
- The London Shakespeare League. (Advocates Elizabethan stage methods of production.)
- The Shakespeare Association. (Meets for afternoon lectures at King's College, London.)
- The Shakespeare Reading Society. (Arranges readings for members in private houses.)
- The Sunday Shakespeare Society. (Reads the plays on Sunday afternoons.)

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